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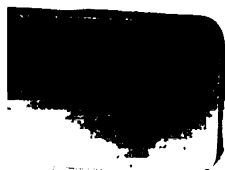


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STORY OF A PASSION



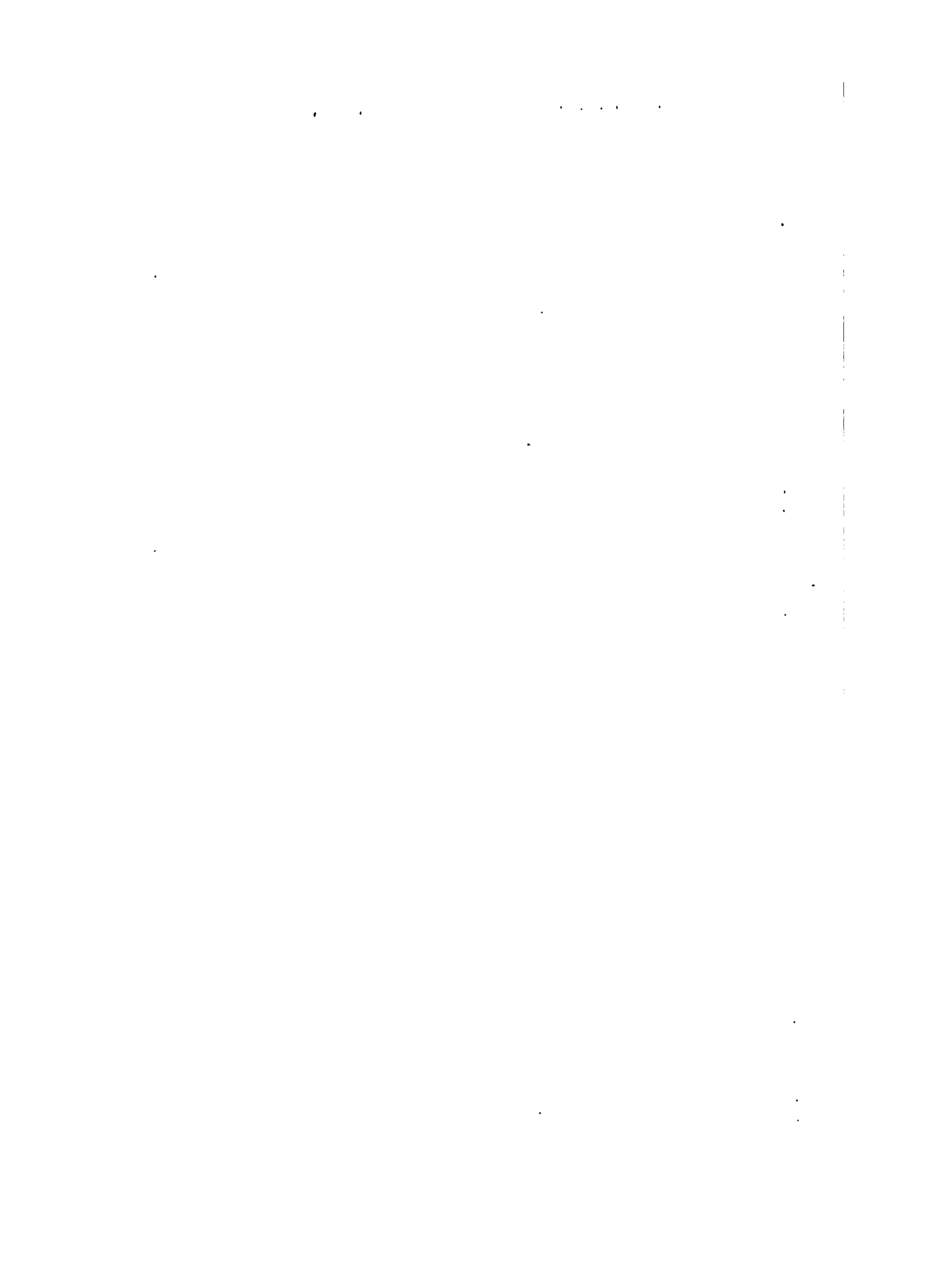
CHARLES GARVICE



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THE STORY OF A PASSION.



The STORY
OF A PASSION

By CHARLES GARVICE



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THE STORY OF A PASSION.

CHAPTER I.

"You are six-and-twenty, I think?"

The speaker, a middle-aged man, with iron-grey hair, and a face furrowed with thought, leant against the mantel-shelf, and looked gravely down at the young man reclining in the easy-chair.

"I am told so," said the young man, with a faint smile.

The famous doctor regarded him for a moment or two in silence, then looked round the room meditatively.

Both the young man and the room were worth looking at. The former was handsome and well-built, with the frame and the grace of an athlete; but his face was pale, and his dark eyes listless and weary, with the shadow below them which tells its own tale. The room was a luxurious one, and its contents were so incongruous that the doctor was justified in regarding them curiously. For instance, there were some choice pictures on the walls, and rare bronzes and curios on the antique cabinets; but beneath the pictures hung foils and masks, and the set of well-worn boxing-gloves lay on an inlaid table beside an *edition de luxe* of the latest minor poet.

The physician's keen eyes wandered back to the handsome, weary face.

"What is the matter with you?" he asked.

Clive Marle smiled again, and slightly shrugged his shoulders.

"My dear Sir William, how should I know? I want you to tell me."

Sir William held out his hand.

"Let me feel your pulse," he said.

Clive Marle laughed, and extended his hand. It was thin and strong, but as white as a woman's. Sir William regarded it curiously.

"You have your uncle's hand, Lord Clive," he remarked.

"Have I? Let us hope the resemblance stops there. Well?"

"Too slow, too thin, too faint," said the doctor. "You've no appetite, and you don't sleep."

"How clever you doctors are!" exclaimed Lord Olive. "You're right; I don't eat, and I don't sleep. The first doesn't matter much—we all eat too much, don't we?—but the last is a nuisance. For goodness' sake, don't give me a tonic or a sleeping-draught; I've tried 'em both."

"I know," said Sir William, concisely. "Is there anything you haven't tried?"

The young man considered for a moment.

"Honestly, I don't think there is," he admitted, with a shameless cheerfulness.

Sir William thrust his hands into his pockets, and frowned at him meditatively.

"Six-and-twenty, and exhausted the world!" he said, more to himself than the patient. "Sometimes, when I think of my own life, its struggles and hardships, its unceasing toil and weariness, I've been inclined to envy you favourites of Fortune; to wish that I had been born, say, a Lord Olive Marle, heir to a marquise, with more money than he knows what to do with, with good looks, the frame of a Hercules, and the capacity for all the pleasures which the world and the devil can provide so liberally. I don't envy you this morning."

"Don't you? Why didn't you go into the Church, doctor? You'd have made a first-rate preacher."

"Six-and-twenty, and the world exhausted! Good Lord, what an age this is! And this is all civilisation can do!"

"It doesn't appear to have done much in my case, does it?" remarked Lord Olive, as cheerfully as before. "And now, I suppose, you'll write a prescription, and go off to talk to some old woman—"

Sir William interrupted him ruthlessly.

"Do you know whither you are drifting?"

"Can't say I do. And I don't care. It seems to me that it doesn't very much matter." And as he spoke, he pressed the electric bell beside him, and his man came in.

"Some Pol Roget, Parsons, please."

Parsons duly appeared with the wine, opened the bottle deftly, filled the two glasses, and retired noiselessly. Lord Olive reached for his, but Sir William took it up before the young man's hand could reach it, and slowly poured it over the ferns in the fire-place.

"That's 1889 wine, Sir William, and not paid for yet," remarked Lord Clive, with a smile.

Sir William glanced at his watch.

"I can give you five minutes more," he said, "and in that five minutes I am going to tell you the truth."

"That will be interesting, no doubt; it will certainly be novel," replied Lord Clive. "I hope it won't be too dry, seeing that you've chucked away my share of the wine."

"Never mind the wine—it is poison to you. Poison! Listen to me. The gods have been very good to you, Lord Clive. They have showered their favours on you with lavish hands. Rank, wealth, good looks, an iron constitution, and a form for which I would willingly have given ten pounds in my student days for the dissecting-table."

"Thanks!"

"What have you done with them?" demanded Sir William, sternly.

The young man regarded him with the same listless smile.

"Is it a conundrum? If so, I give it up."

"Nothing!" resumed Sir William; "or, rather, everything that is bad. Every gift—and what gifts!—has been misapplied. You have lived for pleasure, and pleasure only. No butterfly, no ephemeral insect looking to the sun for its brief span of existence, could have been more irresponsible, more careless, more conscienceless."

"Is it too late to go into the Church?" murmured Lord Clive.

"The bearer of a famous, an historic name, you have dragged it in the scented mud of dissipation and excess; the owner of great wealth, you have spent it, lavished it, on every folly. How many women's hearts have you broken—how many? Be silent, please. You have sent for me, and I am going to tell you the truth."

"All right. But you needn't bore me by telling me what I know already," remonstrated Lord Clive, with a slight yawn. "Of course I've gone the pace; of course I've lived; that's it—lived."

"And now, if you don't take care, you've got to die!" retorted Sir William, grimly.

Lord Clive shrugged his shoulders.

"Most men have, some time or other," he said. "Sooner or later, what does it matter? If you are not going to drink that wine, perhaps you'll be so kind as to pass it over."

Sir William took up the glass and drank the wine.

"My sermon is over," he said. "I might have spared myself, I suppose?"

"You might, indeed!" assented Lord Clive.

"And now for my advice. Follow it, and you will pull round; disregard it, and—" he raised his eyebrows. "How many cigarettes do you smoke in the day?"

"Great Heaven! How can I tell?" was the astonished reply.

"You must give them up. Smoke a pipe; one in the day, one at night."

Lord Clive laughed.

"Drop this stuff." He held up his glass.

"Which you seem to enjoy."

"Which I have earned the right to enjoy," was the stern retort. "Go to bed at eleven—"

Lord Clive stared at him, and laughed again.

"Give up cards, racing, all sorts of excitement—"

"Teach in the Sunday-school, and take a Bible class," wound up Lord Clive.

"Yes; you might do worse than that," said Sir William, coolly.

Lord Clive stretched himself, and looked up with a whimsical smile in his dark eyes. Eloquent, expressive eyes they were; with something in them which women loved to watch for, which made his fellow-men feel kindly toward their owner, which moved even the grim physician to pity and interest.

"And you, a man of the world as well as medicine, really think I could do all this!" said Lord Clive, slowly, listlessly. "My dear Sir William, you mean well, and I've always rather liked you, even as a boy, when you gave me nasty medicine, and stopped my jam and cake. But oh, really, you know, if you don't mind my saying it, you are very amusing, and a trifle absurd. How can I do this? How could I live? What would the fellows say? What would the women think? For instance, I'm going to drive Lottie, of the Empress, and a party down to Richmond this afternoon; and there's a supper at Marston's to-night; and I should look well smoking a pipe, and calling for—what, gingerbeer?"

He laughed, and took out his cigarette-case. Sir William stepped forward and took it out of his hand and put it in his

"Two or three weeks—months—years—don't know," he replied, wearily.

"You will leave London to-day," said Sir William, quietly. "You will go down to some quiet place and stay there for a month."

Lord Olive sighed.

"Well, I might get Wally and one or two other fellows; and we could take a drag, and get some baccarat in the evening—"

"No, you will not take Lord Walter; or any one else, nor a drag, nor baccarat. You will go alone—without even Parsons."

Lord Olive laughed.

"I should go melancholy mad in three days," he remarked.

"Oh, no, you would not; but you *will* go mad if you stay here, I assure you. Let me see." He glanced round the room. "Yes, you can take your rods and get some fishing."

"All over."

"Not sea trout," said Sir William, firmly. "Wait!" He paced up and down the room. "Yes. Do you know Trentishoe?"

"No; and—excuse me, Sir William—I don't want to."

"It is in Devonshire. There is a capital little river there. It runs into the sea at Trentishoe, and there is some good peal and salmon-fishing. You had better go there. Go by this evening's train. There is an inn you could stay at—or, better still, take rooms in one of the cottages or farm-houses. You may read—"

"Thanks; your kindness overwhelms me!"

—"But not too much. No sitting up late at night with a *fin de siècle* novel, as rotten in its grammar as its morals! Fish or ride all day, and go to bed at eleven."

"You forget the Sunday-school! And hadn't I better take a pocket camera with me, and a butterfly net, and a book to press ferns in? Ferns grow in Devonshire, don't they?" said Lord Olive, sarcastically.

Sir William took up his hat.

"There is my advice; you may take it or leave it, Lord Olive."

The young man rose.

"Leave your unfortunate patients, and come with me to the Point-to-Point to-morrow, doctor," he said.

Sir William held out his hand.

"You won't take my advice?" he asked, quietly. "Ah,

well, I'm sorry. Not for your sake," he added, slowly, and in a lower voice. "Lord Clive, I knew your mother!"

A flush rose to the young man's face, and left it paler for the momentary red.

"I know," he said.

Sir William nodded.

"Do you? I don't think you do—all. But I should like to save her son—if I could. When she died, she begged me—you see, I was an old friend as well as doctor—and she begged me— But my time's up. Good-bye. Don't send for me again."

Lord Clive stood regarding the grave, deeply-lined face in silence for a moment, then he said, quiet quietly:

"I'll go."

Sir William nodded, put on his hat, and went out without another word.

Lord Clive went through the open window on to the balcony, and looked absently at St. James's Park, stretching beneath him. The grass was still green, the trees were still in their summer bravery. Children were playing noisily in the enclosures, people were sauntering along the well-kept paths. The doctor's sermon worried him in a vague but persistent way. Twenty-six! It was too young to die. And yet what on earth was there to live for?

Presently Parsons came out, and, looking at his highly-respectable silver lever, said, in a low, persuasive voice:

"The coach will be here in half an hour, my lord."

This meant that he wanted to dress his master.

"All right," said Lord Clive, listlessly, but he did not move. A quarter of an hour passed, and the faithful Parsons hurried up again, watch in hand.

"You will wear the light frock-coat, my lord?" he murmured.

Lord Clive straightened himself, sighed, and went in.

Presently the coach came round. It was the best turn-out of the season; perfect, from its four glistening chestnuts to the burnished horn in its snowy basket. There were three ladies already on board, Lord Walter Sartoris—commonly called "Wally"—and Sir Terence Brady. Lottie, of the Empress, in a marvellous costume—a costume which Wally declared had struck him purple—was in the seat of honour beside the driver's. They were laughing, and the ladies greeted the grey-frocked figure, as it came down the steps, with acclamations and the kissing of hands.

Lord Clive climbed to his seat and took the white leather

reins, the grooms released the leaders' heads, the high-fettled horses plunged and curvetted, and the coach started.

Clive Marle was famous for his cattle—he was famous for many things; some of them less creditable—and the pair he was driving required some strength and skill in their management. As he talked to Lottie and tooled the coach round the narrow corners, he looked at his hands, almost as slender as a girl's, but as steady as a blacksmith's, and asked himself if the doctor could be right. But he knew that Sir William Fagan never made a mistake. Besides, there was a queer little pulsation in his heart which seemed to corroborate Sir William's dictum.

As the coach left the Park it passed a tall, thin old man, as upright as a dart in his frock-coat. He was handsome still, though his closely cut hair was snowy white, and his moustache tinged with grey, and, but for a slight stiffness in his gait, he might well have passed for, say, fifty. It was Clive's uncle, the Marquis of Doyne, and he was sixty-nine.

At sight of him, Clive pulled up, and the marquis stopped and raised his hat. The two men were fond, and, in their way, proud, of each other. For any number of years past, Lord Doyne had been called "the Wicked Marquis," and Clive—well, Clive promised to inherit the adjective as well as the title.

"Good-morning, Lottie; good-morning, ladies," said the old gentleman, in his clear, well-bred voice. "Well, Clive, whither goeth it?"

"Richmond, sir," said Clive. "Will you join?"

"Oh, do, dear Lord Doyne!" chorused the ladies; but the marquis shook his head.

"Lunching with the prince," he said. "Off with you. Be good, and be happy!"

Clive touched his hat and drove on. The phrase, uttered in candid mockery, haunted him for, well, quite five minutes. He had never been good; had he ever been happy? Oh, surely, yes! He recalled many such outings as this; scenes of wild gaiety, hours of reckless pleasure and dissipation. What rot the doctor preached!

As the horses settled down, he turned to the gaily-dressed girls and talked to them as they expected to be talked to. Wally, kneeling on the seat behind him, joined in. Sir Terence played elfin melodies on the horn; the party grew light-hearted, and Lord Clive's gravity melted like snow beneath a summer's sun.

At Richmond they found an obsequious landlord, an army

of waiters, and an elaborate lunch awaiting them. The foaming wine of the sunny South, as Tennyson called champagne, flowed freely and frequently; the girls chatted like magpies; Sir Terence was in his best form, and Lord Wally, with moustaches drawn with burnt cork on his hairless lips, sang and behaved like a Bacchanalian angel.

"What a delicious time we have had!" sighed Lottie, as she linked her arm through Clive's and pressed it to the place where her heart ought to have been. "What a pity it can't last! But I've got to get back to that hateful Empress. Oh, why wasn't I born a lady with ten thousand a year? Give me a light for my cigarette; here, I'll take it from yours!" For Clive was smoking.

The horses were put to, and bounded on their homeward way. The party was merry and noisy. Lottie, at the request of Lord Wally, obliged with the song which nightly roused the enthusiasm of the vast audience at the Empress, and the other ladies joined in the chorus, to which Sir Terence endeavoured, with doubtful success, to provide a horn accompaniment. Lord Clive smiled, and drove with the skill and care of an accomplished whip; but he was rather silent. The queer little pulsation at his heart, the half-faint sensation, were making themselves perceptible.

As he pulled up at his house in St. James's, Wally leant forward.

"See you at Marston's, Clive?"

"No," said Clive, quietly.

"No! Why?" cried Lottie.

"Otherwise engaged, my child," he said. "Don't worry."

He resigned the reins to Sir Terence, who undertook to drop the rest of the party at their houses, and entered the house.

CHAPTER II.

"PACK some riding and fishing things, Parsons," he said. "And have me taken to catch the Western Express."

Parsons was too well trained to start or stare.

"I go with you, my lord?"

"No; I go alone. Put in the fishing-rods."

"Yes, my lord. What do I label the luggage?"

"Don't label it at all," said Lord Clive. "I'll write if I want anything; but, if I do, keep the address to yourself. Give me some champagne."

He dropped back in his chair and wiped his face; it was white, and his dark eyes shone with unnatural brightness, with

the glassy glitter of insomnia. He changed his smart grey frock suit for a travelling tweed, and tried to eat the dinner which his cook—a *chef* of reputation—had sent up; but the daintily-cooked food failed to tempt him, and, in lieu of dinner, he smoked “the eternal cigarette.” “The last!” he muttered to himself, with a cynical smile at his own weakness.

Parsons accompanied him to Paddington, and saw to the luggage; but Lord Olive took his own ticket.

“I’ll write if I want anything. Don’t worry, Parsons!” were his last words—for the man, who was devoted to his master, looked anxious.

The night express to the West is a good train, and Lord Olive had, by a tip, secured the whole of his first-class carriage to himself, in the hope that he should sleep. But the hope proved a vain one. He travelled to Ilfracombe wide awake, with Sir William’s sermon haunting him; and at intervals he smiled cynically as he thought what a fool he was to follow the famous physician’s advice. But Olive Marle, with all his vices, and faults, and weaknesses, had not yet ceased to regard a promise as sacred. He had said: “I will go!” and he was going to keep his word.

A coach was waiting at Ilfracombe, and he climbed up to the front seat.

“Let me drive, will you?” he said.

The coachman looked doubtful, and handed him the reins hesitatingly, but in less than five minutes his doubt disappeared.

“Used to it, sir?” he enquired, with a smile.

Lord Olive nodded. He was very pale; the queer little tick, tick at his heart was going strong, but his hand was steady and his nerves tightly strung.

“There’s a place called Trentishoe, isn’t there?” he asked, languidly.

The coachman nodded, but stared.

“There is, sir. Oh, yes; a rum, out-of-the-world place, sir. Do we put you down there? We don’t go quite close.”

“Well, go close to-day,” said Lord Olive; and the man offered no protest or objection; Lord Olive could generally manage to have his way with men—and, alas! most women.

He drove steadily, skilfully, up and down the steep Devon hills, with an art and a tact, and a knowledge of the capacity of the horses which filled the professional whip with boundless admiration, and in due course they arrived at a valley which was as nearly Swiss as anything in England could be. A steep road wound snakily between fir-clothed hills—the air

was redolent of terebene, which stole upon the senses like an opiate—beside green meadows and abreast of a rippling silver stream. Ferns and wild flowers, in modest colours, lined the way; the birds—the thrush, the linnet, the finch—sang melodiously.

"This is Trentishoe, sir," said the coachman.

Lord Olive looked round listlessly.

"It is out of the world," he remarked, absently.

"So it is, sir; so it is," assented the man. "Are you going to the Hunters' Inn?"

Lord Olive nodded.

"Then there you are, sir," said the coachman, pointing to an old house with an ivy-covered gable which peeped through a group of firs at the roadside.

Lord Olive pulled up, handed the reins to their proper custodian, with a sovereign, and climbed down. The luggage was put out, and the landlord emerged from the porch in his shirt sleeves, and stared from the portmanteau to Lord Olive with a placid curiosity. He shook his head in answer to the inquiry for a room.

"You'd better be going to Holly Farm, sir," he said.

"It's just up the road; you can see the chimneys. Willie, take the gentleman's luggage, and tell Mrs. Jennings that I sent 'un."

Olive followed the wheelbarrow up the road, and entered the kitchen and living-room of the farm-house. Mrs. Jennings was cooking bacon, and came forward with the hot fork in her plump hands to welcome the stranger. In five minutes Lord Olive found himself in a small room under the thatch roof, a room whose cleanliness and sparseness of furniture filled him with a completely new sensation; and half an hour later he was sitting in the kitchen before a dish of eggs and bacon, and a huge cup of tea.

There was no fuss made over him; the farmer came and sat down at the same table, and partook of the same dish, and Mrs. Jennings, and a flaxen-haired Devonshire lass bashfully waited upon them both with strict impartiality.

The thing suited Lord Olive in his present humour. The smell of the peat fire mingling with the odour of lavender which floated through the window soothed him; and, having made a pretence of eating some of the ham and eggs, he leant back, and through half-closed eyes watched with serene interest the farmer wade conscientiously through a massive pile of the same fare.

And when Mrs. Jennings said, with a respectful curiosity:

"And what may your name be, sir?" he concealed his rank, and replied:

"Marle."

"Lor'! that sounds like Devonshire, sir," she said; and Olive, mistily recalling a branch of the Doyne family which dated from the county, nodded in assent.

After supper—he was in doubt whether to call it supper or tea—he took out his pipe—brand new, and bought that day—and strolled through the square patch of garden into the road.

He was standing in a valley as beautiful, though not as wide, as any in Switzerland. The hills were lined with firs, the banks were covered with ferns, a stream ran brawling over the stones behind the hedge on his left hand. He could catch a glimpse of it shining like silver in the moonlight.

He looked round him listlessly, and thought of a card-party at which he had promised to be present. They were playing at this moment. And he was here! Here! out of the world, with nothing to do; with no champagne, no cigarettes, "no nothing"! With the unaccustomed pipe between his lips, he sauntered down the valley, and presently found himself at the mouth of the river, and, consequently, by the sea. The river ran over a gravelly beach with a soft, rippling sound, then trickled over a bed of sand and lost itself in the bar between two huge rocks.

"It's a scene in a Drury Lane pantomime," he said to himself, with a smile. "Presently a fairy—badly made up—will pop through a trap-door and reel off the old wheeze. I hope I shall be spared the clown and pantaloons. Good Lord! how long shall I be able to stand it?"

He climbed on to the left-hand rock and lay on one arm, listening to the brawl of the stream, and the dull, booming accompaniment of the sea, and wondered whether he should sleep that night; and while he was still wondering he dozed off.

It was the first sound sleep he had had for a week, and he was revelling in it, when a sound awoke him. At first he thought he was dreaming; for the sound was a girl's voice.

He opened his eyes, and listened for a moment or two without moving. It was a girl's voice, and a sweet one. It seemed to float toward him on the beams of the moonlight, and to be a part of the light itself.

"The local mermaid," he said to himself. "I shall find myself dragged down into the water presently, and be offered a small comb and a back-hair glass."

He raised himself on his elbow, and looked in the direction of the sound.

A girl was seated on the other rock; a young girl in a white muslin frock. Her arms were round her knees, her head drooping dreamily, her whole pose was graceful and picturesque. He could see her face quite plainly, and saw that it was a beautiful one. Her eyes were grey—the grey which sometimes masquerades as blue; her hair of a soft brown tinged with auburn, and it clustered in wild, yet dainty, feathery curls on the smooth white brow, and fell in waves of colour about the shell-like ears. The hands clasping her knees were brown, yet shapely; there were no rings on them, no article of jewelry about her. The girl seemed to Clive more of a vision than a reality. He saw that she was a lady, and he asked himself how he could contrive to get away without disturbing her.

The question prompted him to look round his perch, and he was considerably startled to find that his rock was surrounded by water. The tide had risen while he slept, and he was rock bound.

As Sir William had not advised him to spend the night in the open air, he rose and looked about for a means of escape from what appeared to be a ridiculous position, and the girl saw him.

Her song ceased, but she did not move, but sat like a part of the rock itself, regarding him with blank astonishment in her frank, almost child-like eyes. Lord Clive stood staring at her for a moment, uncertain what to say or do; and she was the first to speak.

"Can you swim?" she asked; and her voice was clear and free from any trace of shyness.

"Yes," he replied.

"That is all right, then," she said. "Because there is no boat here, and you would have had to wait until the tide had gone out again."

She rose as she spoke, and, with light but firm steps, made her way down her rock, which sloped to the shore, and disappeared.

Lord Clive stood still staring for a moment or two at the spot which she had vacated, then he slid off the rock headforemost and swam the few yards between him and dry land; and, on his feet again, looked round eagerly.

But the girl had apparently gone.

"The local mermaid without a doubt!" he said, as he wiped the water out of his eyes and strolled towards the farm.

But the girl had not gone. She had slipped behind a neighbouring rock and had waited until Lord Clive had sauntered out of sight. Then she turned to the left and made her way up a fern-lined path into a small pine coppice. Here she paused and thoughtfully looked through the slim branches of the trees down at the two rocks.

The young man's sudden appearance had startled her, though she had seemed so calm, and she was recalling the incident and wondering who he was. The moonlight had been full upon Clive's face, and she had had time—women do not require much—to see that he was singularly handsome. But it was not his good looks which had impressed her so much as his manner and the cool *sang-froid* with which he had accepted the situation and her injunction, and dived into the water.

Trentishoe is off the beaten track, but now and again Beryl Frayne had met the ubiquitous tourist in the loud checks and knickerbockers and spats; but this stranger had looked and behaved very differently from the obnoxious tourist. She knew nothing of the world—nearly all her life had been spent in this enchanted valley—and therefore she did not know that what had impressed her in him was that indefinable air of high birth and gentle breeding which is as obvious as it is indefinable.

For quite five minutes she stood and looked down, and the one word he had spoken, "Yes!" rang persistently in her ears; then, with a slight raising of the clearly-marked brows, as if to dispel her reflections, she went on her way.

Half-way up the fir-clad hill the lights of a cottage pierced the trees. It was a small place, but picturesque enough to make the fortune of a capable artist. There were only two floors, and they were low; the roof was of thatch, into which the upper windows grew, so to speak; a verandah ran along the front, and through the open window floated the sound of a chamber organ.

Beryl paused outside the window, listening with a suddenly tender look in her grey eyes, then she entered softly. But, softly as she moved, the man at the organ heard her and turned his head.

He was not an old man, but his hair was white, and there was a worn and melancholy expression on his face.

"Is that you, Beryl!" he asked, in a subdued voice; but he need not have asked, for though he could not see her—he was blind—he knew her step, her very breathing.

"Yes, father," she replied; and she went behind him and put both hands on his bent shoulders.

"Where have you been?" he asked.

"Down at the rocks," she answered; and she was about to tell him of her meeting with the stranger, but stopped; why, she could not have told.

"It is a beautiful night, is it not?" he said. "I can feel the moonlight even in here."

"Yes. It is almost as clear as day. Will you not come out on the verandah, dear?"

"Presently," he said, with a sigh. "I can not get this right, Beryl; and I can not leave it until I do. Listen."

He played an air, an exquisite piece of music, or rather a portion of one, for his fingers stopped suddenly, and he sighed again: "That is as far as I can get; the end eludes me—eludes me! I can feel it, hear it, and yet—!"

The girl stood quite still for a moment, her eyes fixed dreamily on the mirror above the organ, then she drew a stool beside his, gently took his drooping hands from the keys and played.

The man listened intently, eagerly, for a moment or two, then his face lit up with the artist's rapture. She had taken the air and finished it—perfected it, indeed.

"Yes, yes; that is it!" he exclaimed, in a kind of repressed excitement. "That is what I meant! But I was struck dumb in the middle, while you—! Beryl, you are a musician! Only a musician could have done what you have just done. The gods have bestowed on you with open hands the great gift, the greatest of all! Be thankful, be grateful, Beryl! Yes; to me is denied the full power—they closed their niggard hands to me—but to you—! Sing it, Beryl."

She played the accompaniment softly, and as softly sang the air; and the exquisite melody of the composition floated through the rooms and out into the moonlight to the listening, sweet-scented flowers.

There were tears in the man's sightless eyes long before she had finished.

"Beautiful! beautiful!" he murmured. She laid her head on his shoulder, and wound her arm round his neck, while she played softly with her free hand.

"What a gift!" he went on, as if to himself. "What would the world say if it could hear her! It would go mad with delight, and crown her the Queen of Song—would throw itself at her feet."

"Father!" cried the girl, with faint surprise.

He checked himself, and sighed.

"It is true, Beryl," he said, more calmly, but still with a

tremor in his voice; the dull, subdued voice of the blind. "But you are content to remain outside; you are not pining for fame and glory; you know that I know what is best for you, do you not, Beryl?"

"Yes, oh, yes, dear!" she assented, placidly, unhesitatingly. "Why should I not be content and happy while you are?"

"You never repine?" he said, with repressed earnestness and suggestive doubt. "You never ask yourself why you cannot go out into the world like other girls, why you are kept shut up, like a prisoner, in this remote place, with only a blind father as a companion—?"

"Hush, hush, dear!" she murmured, with loving reproach. "Never, never! I am quite happy, quite contented."

"Your voice sounds true; and I thank God!" he said, and there was a note of devout solemnity in his own voice. "The world is a cruel place, Beryl. I—and others"—his voice faltered—"have found it so. You are safe here, dear. Safe!"

The girl looked at him with tender gravity. She did not understand him in the least.

He was silent for a moment or two, then he said:

"How old are you, Beryl? But I know—you will be twenty next month."

"Yes," she said, with a soft laugh. "I am getting quite old, dear, am I not? Do you know that I have grown quite lately, and that I am a great girl now?"

He turned his sightless eyes on her wistfully.

"If I could but see you for one minute, only one minute!" he exclaimed. "I would only ask for that, and be content! And yet I know so well what you are like. Love is blind, and yet it sees. You say that you are like—" He turned his eyes to a portrait on the wall behind him; the portrait of a lovely woman—a girl, rather.

"Like my mother—yes," replied Beryl, in a low voice. The man winced and nodded.

"Like your mother—yes," he said, and there was a ring of pain in his voice. "Like your mother. I see her when I look at you; when you speak, hear her." He stopped, and his delicately-cut lips writhed. "Beryl, if—if ever you should feel discontented with the life you are leading, if ever you should feel one moment's longing for the world outside, remember that I have not condemned you to this life without cause, without good reason; and that if your mother could speak, she would say that I had acted wisely. *She* found the world cruel and pitiless."

"My mother!" murmured the girl, surprised, and with a troubled look in her eyes.

As if the question had made him conscious of the significance of his speech, her father checked himself, and closed his lips tightly.

"Some day, I—I will tell you your mother's story, Beryl," he said, hoarsely. "No, no; not now! When you are older. No more!" he added, quickly, and almost harshly, as if he had seen her lips move. "Go to bed now, my child! I will play this over until I have fixed it in my mind. Go, now!"

She rose obediently, kissed him, and moved toward the door. As she passed the portrait on the wall, she raised her eyes, and looked at it; and, not for the first time, the sad, grey eyes of the picture seemed to look at her pleadingly, and yet pityingly.

But it was not of her dead mother, or even of her dearly-loved father, that she thought, as she slowly undressed; but of the man who had risen from the rock, the man whose single word had rung in her ears, even as she had composed the concluding strains of the sonata.

Would she see him again?

Meanwhile, Lord Clive lay tossing on the lavender-scented bed of Holly Farm. At intervals he swore softly, and called himself a fool, and the famous Sir William an ass. Towards morning he did get a little sleep, but it was haunted by dreams of past follies—and the voice of a young girl, seated on a rock by the sea.

Breakfast was on the table when he sauntered into the living-room, a breakfast substantial enough for the gods—bacon and eggs, a huge ham, a round of beef, potatoes of delicate brown, cream in quaint glass dishes, and golden honey in the comb.

Lord Clive regarded the spread with his too-brilliant eyes—and asked for toast. Mrs. Jennings—her lord and master had long since gone a-farming—was in the depths of despair.

"You've caught a chill last night, that's what it is, sir," she said, sorrowfully. "If you would only try and pick a little bit o' ham, or a couple of eggs or so, you'd feel so much the better for 'em!"

"Yes, I suppose I've caught a chill," answered Clive, to please her. "And now, I'm going to try and catch some trout. Don't you worry about me, Mrs. Jennings; I'm stronger than I look."

He got his fishing-rod, and went out. The sun was shining brightly, the air was fragrant with the scent of the flowers

and the firs, and the valley was musical with the song of the birds and the hum of the bees; but Lord Clive, as he wandered beside the stream, felt bored to death. It was too bright for fishing—the knowing fish sailed up to the fly as it fell on the water, smiled blandly, and swam away again—and, after a little while, he threw his rod down, and strolled up the narrow road which wound to the right of the valley.

After all, why shouldn't he go back? He had kept his word: he had come to Trentishoe—had not smoked a single cigarette, or touched alcohol.

"Good heavens! I didn't think it would be *quite* so bad as this!" he muttered, as he stopped and leant against the low gate of the church-yard, which nestled in a hollow of the road. "And I didn't promise to stay till I was melancholy mad! Yes; I'll go back and ask that colossal old ass to recommend me a decent undertaker."

With his hat on the back of his head, he stared vacantly at the tiny, ivy-covered church, and presently he began to wonder whether it was open. The sun was hot; it would be cool inside.

He opened the gate and went up the path of fine, loose sea gravel, and listlessly entered the church. It was a quaint, severe little place, without a single point of interest; but it was deliciously cool, and he went into a pew and leant his bare head against the high back, and stared at the old and hideous monuments and tablets, and the worm-eaten roof.

The quiet was profound, the silence intense.

"I wonder what it would feel like to be good?" he thought, with a half-sad, half-cynical smile. "I wonder whether, if one had been brought up in this benighted hole, one would ever wish for anything else? I wonder—"

He started, with his series of conundrums broken off short; for, suddenly, behind him, and above his head, there came a strain of soft and beautiful music. It was so unexpected, so eerie, that he could almost have fancied that it only sounded in his imagination; but, presently, he recognized one of Mozart's voluntaries, and he closed his eyes and listened, with a listless, weary kind of satisfaction. Presently the music ceased, and he awoke, so to speak, and rose rather quickly.

"Organist chap will come down and want to jaw," he muttered. He made his way to the door as quickly, and opened it. It struck him that it had been open when he came in; and he was surprised to find that the iron gates on the outside of the porch were closed, too; and still more greatly astonished to find, when he tried them, that they were locked.

He was shaking them in the usual absurd and futile way when he heard a step behind him, and, looking over his shoulder, saw a young girl standing in the door-way. He knew her in an instant; it was the girl who had been sitting on the rock. He raised his hat, and shook the gate again.

"The gate's locked, I'm afraid," he said.

Calmly and serenely she looked at him with her blue-grey eyes.

"The sexton is deaf and stupid, sometimes, and often forgets that I am here; so I carry a key."

She smiled as she put her hand in the mysterious pocket at the back of her dress; then the smile faded, and she regarded Lord Olive with eyes grown suddenly grave.

"I've left it at home, in my other dress. We are locked in!" she said, in a tone of annoyance.

CHAPTER III.

BERYL's brown, well-defined brows drew together, and the long lashes swept her cheek with a frown of annoyance.

"I do not know what is to be done!" she said, almost inaudibly.

Olive smiled to himself, while regarding her with the proper expression of gravity and regret.

"Does it very much matter?" he asked.

Beryl raised her eyes, and looked at him with surprise.

"I want to go home!" she said.

"Oh! I beg your pardon! I am afraid I was thinking of myself only," he rejoined, "and I don't want to go home. But is it so very serious? I mean, are we likely to be kept here till next Sunday? Will no vessels chance to pass this way and pick us up? We are rather like a shipwrecked couple cast on an island, aren't we?"

A faint smile dawned in her eyes at his simile—a smile which lit up her face and made it startlingly lovely.

"Saunders—that is, the sexton—*may* come back; sometimes, very often, indeed, he forgets something. He locks the gate to keep the children out of the porch; they will play at shops in these benches, and the vicar thinks that it is—is not proper. Yes, Saunders may come back."

"Meanwhile, I suppose we might as well sit down. It is not much use shouting?"

"Not in the least," she replied. "No one comes near the church-yard, excepting on Sundays; it is out of the way of the regular road."

"Then, will you not sit down?" he said; and she sank down on the worm-eaten bench opposite him, with a kind of impatient resignation.

Olive sat down, too, and looked serenely through the gate, and then at her. She was very beautiful, with a beauty which was not all English. The eyes and the gold-tinged hair were Saxon enough, but the brows and the clear oval of the face were foreign. He guessed her age pretty accurately, though he reckoned her a little younger than she was; but he was misled by the entire absence of any embarrassment, the child-like fearlessness and frankness which shone in her clear, transparent eyes. He felt that their fearlessness sprang from innocence; and it reminded him of the birds he had seen on an island in the Pacific, which refused to fly at his approach, because they had not yet learned to fear the monster, man. That she was annoyed at, and impatient of, her detention was evident; and it rather amused Lord Clive Marle; for, hitherto, her sex had not displayed any great aversion from his company. The heir to the marquisate of Doyme was not usually shunned by women. He wondered if this girl's manner would change if she knew who he was; and the moment after felt ashamed of the mental question. It wronged her. He noticed her dress: a grass-lawn blouse and a black alpaca skirt, both fitting perfectly the slim, girlish figure, with its youthful grace and suppleness. She held her gloves in her hand, and he remarked its shapeliness and the length of the tapering fingers; it was a musician's hand. He also noticed there was no wedding-ring on it—no ring of any kind, in fact. Her beauty and her grace, her fearlessness, her serene and child-like absence of restraint and shyness, interested him; but not very keenly.

This young man, who had "exhausted life" at twenty-six, had seen—and been pursued—by too many beautiful and charming women to be smitten with enthusiasm at the sight of a country lass, though she was of a type he had not yet met.

And Beryl, when he looked down at the feet-worn stones, or through the gate, regarded him in return.

She had seen last night that he was handsome, but she had not then been able to observe the unnatural brightness of his eyes, the shadows beneath them, and that peculiar expression of the face which tells of stress and strain. She noticed all this now, and wondered whether he was very ill. Her eyes took a survey of his clothes. They were by no means new—he had fished in them on many rivers; had been wet through

in them some scores of times—but he wore them as no man she had as yet seen had worn his clothes. Indeed, he was very different from any man she had as yet met, though she could have scarcely explained in what way. They had both been silent for some minutes—Clive could, when he liked, preserve a sphinx-like taciturnity—and Beryl, being a woman, was the first to find the silence irksome.

"I hope you did not catch cold last night," she said, regarding him with grave eyes.

"Thanks; not in the least," answered Clive. "I enjoyed the bath. It would have been rather difficult to catch cold, wouldn't it?"

"That depends upon how far you had to go in your wet clothes," she responded, with womanly wisdom.

"Only to Holly Farm. I am staying there. You know it, of course? Or are you only a visitor, like myself?"

Beryl smiled.

"I live here. I have lived here nearly all my life."

She spoke as if she were at least fifty.

"I live at Hill Cote—the little house on the hill over the valley; you may have seen it."

"No," he said; "I only arrived here last night. Let me introduce myself. My name is—" He paused for a second. His name was—well, too well-known. The paragraphists of the society papers had for some years past derived a regular income from it. It was more than possible that some of the stories of his—well, say, follies, had reached even this remote spot. He looked at her steadily, as he continued, "Marle—Clive Marle."

She did not start or blush or frown, and he was sensible of a feeling of relief as he raised his hat. It was evident that she had not heard of him.

"And mine is Frayne—Beryl Frayne," she said, with an exquisite simplicity. "I live with my father. And why did you come down here—I mean, how did you hear of it?"

"A friend—to be exact, my doctor—sent me," said Clive, a little listlessly. It was a bore to have to talk of himself.

"You have been—are ill?" she enquired, her eyes resting on him with the interest and compassion with which all women are so ready.

"Not ill," he replied, a little impatiently; "a trifle off colour. I beg your pardon!"

"Oh, I think I know what you mean!" she said, with a slight smile. "You have been working too hard, perhaps?"

"Yes; that's it, no doubt," assented Clive, with a gravity

which would have convulsed Lord Wally and his other friends could they have heard him.

"It is a pity to work too hard," she said, a little sadly. "My father has done that. He is a musician—a composer; and has given his life to music. You may have heard of him—Sebastian Frayne?"

"I'm ashamed to say I haven't," answered Clive. "I'm awfully fond of music—who isn't?—but I don't know much about it. And you live alone with him?"

"Yes," she replied. "My mother is dead, and I was the only child. She was an Italian, and died in Italy."

"That explains," said Clive to himself; but she had heard him.

"Explains?"

"I beg your pardon! I meant that it explained the foreign look in your face."

He expected her to be offended at his candour; but she regarded him with frank questioning.

"Is there anything foreign in my face? I did not know."

"And your voice," he added. "You have a beautiful one. I heard it last night, you know."

She did not blush, as another girl might have done, at his open compliment. She knew that her voice was good, just as she knew that she had arms and legs.

"My father taught me," she said, simply.

There was a moment's pause; then she went on:

"And do you like this place? Do you think it will do you good? It is supposed to be very good for sick people."

"Oh, don't call me a sick person!" he remonstrated.

She laughed—a soft laugh, which struck him as perhaps the sweetest he had ever heard.

"The mixture of sea and moorland air, and the scent of the pines—"

"Are first-rate things for consumption and that kind of thing," he put in. "Yes, I know; but I haven't got anything of the sort. Oh, yes; it's a beautiful spot, and I dare say I shall get on all right for a little while. It's a question whether I can kill Time, or Time kill me."

"I see," she said, her eyes resting on him with a thoughtful intentness which almost made Clive smile. It was as if she were studying a new and curious animal. "Why don't you fish? Everybody who comes here does."

"So I should imagine by the way the trout behave," he said, drily. "They turn up their noses and laugh audibly at my fly."

She smiled.

"There is better fishing on the moor," she remarked. "It is not very far from here. I go sometimes."

"You fish?" he asked, with a slightly surprised air.

"Yes; there is so little else to do. You should go to the Weir Water."

"Where is it? No pun intended, I assure you."

She stared at him, then smiled.

"Oh, I see! It is about five miles from here. Any of the Jennings could show you; and if you could not walk so far you could have their jingle—"

"Or a bath-chair," said Clive, gravely. "I think I'm equal to five miles."

"It is rather difficult to find," she said, thoughtfully.

"You go up the valley, and across Moss Hill until you come to the three firs—"

"Long before which I should have lost my way—I am the biggest idiot at finding places. And as to the Jennings—well, I never saw a family with less time on their hands, or more bent on killing themselves with work."

"I could show you," she said.

Clive stared at her for an instant, then looked aside quickly, for the frankness of her innocent eyes smote him.

"You are very good," he answered, as if she had offered to lend him a hymn-book.

"Not at all," she said, in a matter-of-fact way. "But I do not know when I could go; I could not to-day, because I have some music to copy; and to-morrow—well, yes, I might go to-morrow afternoon—it is of no use going in the morning, it would be too bright."

"Far too bright," he assented, copying her matter-of-fact tone as closely as he could, and keeping his eyes carefully fixed on his boots. "What time?"

"Four o'clock," she said, after a minute's thought. "I will meet you at the top of the valley. What flies have you got?"

He took out his well-worn fly-book and opened it, and, with the absorption and unconsciousness of a boy, she crossed over to him and looked over it with him.

"Oh, they are of no use!" she said, with a touch of gentle contempt. "You might as well put on a piece of colored rag. Those are Scotch flies, are they not?"

"Some. Irish others; and these are Corsican."

She looked up at him with frank interest.

"You have been there? How I envy you! I mean"—for

at the moment the words her father had spoken on the preceding night flashed across her mind—"No, I don't envy you; but it must be very nice to travel."

"Is it?" he said, listlessly.

She regarded him with wide-open eyes.

"You said that as if you were tired out," she said.

"Did I? Well, I'm afraid I am, or nearly."

"That's because you are not well," she replied, gently.

"You will get better and stronger. No, those flies are of no use whatever. I will bring some of my own."

"You are very good," he said. "It was a fortunate thing for me that Sampson locked the gate and you had forgotten the key."

"Saunders, not Sampson."

"I beg his pardon."

"And he has not come back!" she said, as if suddenly reminded of their detention. "What shall we do?"

Olive glanced at the rickety old gates. He knew what he could do, but he did not tell her, at any rate.

"We might wait a little longer—just a few minutes. The old fellow may turn up. It is very cool here. You were playing the organ, were you not? You play it on Sundays?"

"Yes," she said. She went to the gate and looked through it, and then returned to her place opposite him; and Olive wished she had come back to her seat beside him. "Oh, yes; I or father. He plays magnificently. You will hear him on Sunday if you are here," she added, simply. Olive dropped his eyes. How long was it since he had attended a service at church?

"Oh, yes; of course," he said. "I should be very glad. And are you?"—he paused a second—"are you going into the profession?"

"The profession? Oh, you mean am I going to sing or play in public? Oh, no, no; my father would not let me!"

"No? I thought you said he was a musician—a composer?"

"Yes, he is; but—he would not wish me—allow me—Is that Saunders? There is something moving there, by the hedge."

"It's a donkey," said Olive, surveying it contentedly.

Beryl drew a breath of disappointment and impatience.

"No, my father does not wish me to leave Trentishoe—to go into the world."

"You have never been to London?" he enquired, regarding her with a listless kind of surprise.

She shook her head.

"No farther than Coombe," she said. "It is a very large place, is it not?"

"Very," he assented, drily, as he recalled the small, straggling town.

"London must be very grand," she observed, absently. "Sometimes I have wished that I could see it; but not often. I am quite happy and contented with Trentishoe. Will you tell me the time, Mr. Marle? What a singular name! How do you spell it?"

Olive gravely spelt it for her, and devoutly hoped her father had not heard it, and did not possess a "Guide to the Peerage." "It is a quarter past twelve."

"Oh, I must go! I really must!" she said, with a laugh, half of amusement, half of impatience. "Saunders! Saunders!" she called, and her sweet voice rang full and round as a bell.

There was no response, and she began to tap the flags with her foot and bite her lips softly.

Olive sighed inaudibly. He was quite content with the place and his company; but if she *would* go—well, she must.

"I wonder whether I could force the lock?" he said, as if the idea had just occurred to him. He rose, and caught hold of the gates and shook them.

"It doesn't matter, I suppose?" he enquired of her. "I sha'n't be pulled up before the local beak—I beg your pardon, I mean magistrate—and sent to penal servitude for sacrilege, or whatever it is, shall I?"

"Oh, no, no!" she replied, with a smile. "But I'm afraid you can't do it. It's iron, and so big."

He held one gate, and put his knee up against the other, and the rickety, rusty old lock gave way like putty.

Beryl uttered a slight cry of relief and satisfaction.

"Oh, thank you! thank you!" she said. "That was capital! How strong you must be! and ill, too—"

Then suddenly she stopped, and a smile gave place to an expression of grave displeasure, for something in his eyes had given him away.

"You could have done that at first—from the very first?" she said, accusingly.

"I could," he admitted. "But I didn't think of it—not at first."

"But you did think of it—some time before—just now. Why did you not do it?"

He looked at her, and for the first time in his life he felt

embarrassed by a woman's, a girl's, eyes. They seemed, with their grave, almost pained, regard, as though they were steadily fixed on him, to shame him into the truth.

"I didn't want to," he said, almost brusquely.

A flush rose to her face, and spread from her neck to her brow; then she moved toward the open gate, and was going without a word of adieu.

But Clive would not have that.

"Are you so angry, so angry that you won't say 'Good-morning,' Miss Frayne?" he asked, in the half-weary, musical voice which had proved so effectual with most women who had come within the circle of its spell.

She paused, and bit her lip again. Then:

"Good-morning," she said, softly.

Clive raised his hat.

"That means that you *are* angry, that you don't mean to forgive me, and that you certainly don't intend to show me the way to the—what do you call it—Water?" he remarked, looking at her with his unnaturally bright eyes.

"Yes," she replied. "You should not have done it."

"I didn't do it," he rejoined.

She frowned.

"You *should* have done it. You know what I mean."

"Yes; and I'm very sorry. But I felt lonely—if only you knew how lonely and bored!—and— Ah, well, it doesn't matter! But I'm very sorry. That's the truth, and I'll ask you to believe it. And, after all, I'm going to be punished!"

She stopped, irresolute, outside the porch. He did not offer to follow her, but stood with the gate in his hand.

"Are you sure you can't forgive me?" he pleaded—scarcely pleaded. "Was it so very wrong? Think! Wouldn't it be very—what do you call it?—resentful to refuse to forgive me for what, after all, was not so *very* bad an action?"

She glanced at him for the flash of a second, with a kind of faint trouble in her beautiful eyes.

"I'm very sorry," he repeated. "Won't you accept my apology and show me the stream you spoke of to-morrow?"

Her brows came together.

"I will see," she replied in a low voice, as she turned and left him.

CHAPTER IV.

BERYL, as she walked homewards, almost decided that she would *not* show Mr. Marle the way to the Weir Water.

The ordinary London girl would have thought little of his small piece of deception in the matter of the gate, or would have been rather flattered than otherwise by his desire to keep her in his company; but to Beryl it seemed quite a serious thing. He had sat there, pretending there was no escape for them, while he knew that he could force the gate and release her. There is not much guile in Trentishoe, and the fashionable code of the minor moralities has not yet reached its sylvan vales.

To Beryl truth was truth, and a white lie an anomaly. No; she would not go to the Weir Water!

But before she reached Hill Cote she began to relent. After all, was it so *very* bad of him? And he had pleaded so hard for forgiveness; and he looked so ill, so tired. And the air on the moors through which the Water ran was so fine and light that it would probably do him so much good. And—There were several other “ands” which need not be set down. Perhaps she herself could not have spoken them. But she knew, in her inmost heart, that she wanted to go. It was hard for Beryl Frayne to be cruel, and she felt somehow that it would be hard and resentful to keep away. He seemed so lonely and melancholy!

There was no thought of romance in her mind. The shadow of Love’s wings had not fallen upon her serene and placid maidenhood, and she was a girl, a child still, in all that pertained to the Great Secret.

She found her father playing his violin, and he greeted her with subdued impatience.

“Have you copied the score of the sonata, Beryl?” he asked. “Will you do it now, at once? I want to feel that it is down in black and white.”

“Yes, dear,” she answered, as she tossed her hat on to the sofa, and sat down at the table and drew the music paper toward her.

“I’ll play it over for you,” he said. “Wasn’t it too hot for walking?”

“I have been down to the church,” she replied. Then, after a pause, she went on: “I had an audience this morning. A gentleman had come in. He came in out of the heat, and stayed. That stupid Saunders locked the gates, and we waited until the gentleman forced the locks.”

Sebastian Frayne listened absently, as he played his last composition softly on the superb Stradivarius which he fin-

"Yes; he is an invalid; he looks very ill and worn. He has come down here for his health, and is staying at the Holly Farm. He must have been glad to creep into the church out of the sun."

Without intending it, she was giving her father a quite erroneous impression of Clive Marle. Mr. Frayne, not unnaturally, pictured a feeble, middle-aged, or quite old man, wasted by sickness.

"Yes?" he said, with an utter lack of interest. "I hope the place will do him good."

"I offered to show him the Weir Water to-morrow," continued Beryl.

If her father objected, the question of "go or not go" would be decided for her. But Sebastian Frayne did not object. Beryl, notwithstanding that she had grown "quite tall lately," as she had said, was still a child in his sightless eyes.

"There is good fishing there, is there not? I suppose he fishes?"

"Yes," said Beryl, with a faint sigh, but whether of regret or relief she could not have told. "He was trying to fish this morning. You do not mind my going, dear?"

Even yet he might decide for her.

"No, no! Why should I? Are you ready? Be careful of this prelude; the 'A' is sharp, you know; and there is a change of key— But you know all about it as well as, if not better, than I do."

Beryl began to score the music, and soon forgot Clive Marle and everything else but her work. As her father had said, she was a born musician, and such work as this was a delight to her. As she scored rapidly, she hummed the air, and the room was filled with a soft, dulcet music to which Sebastian Frayne listened with rapt delight.

On the following morning, she went down to the church again, and practised as usual. The organ was a good one, much larger, of course, than the one at Hill Cote, and she loved to fill the empty church with the solemn strains of Mozart or Handel.

She saw no one but Saunders, whom she chided for locking the gates; but the old man was not at all penitent.

"Who be goin' to pay for that there lock, that's what I want to know?" he mumbled, sulkily.

Beryl went home, and, still undecided, went up to her room and looked at her plain, homespun dress, which she always wore when she went fishing.

She sat beside the open window with an open book, but it lay face downwards on her lap, unread. Never in her life had she felt so undecided.

But presently a bank of soft clouds swept up from the west and veiled the sun; and the light, beloved of anglers, came into the sky.

She tossed the book on the bed, changed her dress quickly, and snatching up her rod and fly-book, left the house.

As she passed up the valley she forgot whether she had mentioned any time for her meeting with Mr. Marle. Perhaps he had come, and got tired of waiting and gone; or, perhaps, he would not come for some time yet? After all, had she not better go back?

But she did not turn back.

Meanwhile, Clive was lying full length on a grassy bank at the top of the valley, at a point where the road branched into two forks; one leading to Simonsbath, the other leading whither he knew not. He had spent the morning about the farm, watching the Jennings' family at their "absurd work," or sauntering beside the stream and listening to its music as it tumbled over the stones.

Several times during the day he had asked himself whether she would come; and sometimes he had decided that she would, and at others that she would not. He rather hoped that she would, because he felt bored to death; and she was young and beautiful, and would talk to him. He thought of her a great deal, but without any enthusiasm or any very great desire for her presence. The lethargy of exhaustion held him thrall'd, and made him almost indifferent even to the charm of Beryl Frayne.

But, all the same, there was a smile of welcome on his handsome face as he rose to meet her.

"I thought you would come," he said, not too wisely, as he raised his hat.

She stopped short, and looked at him. She had not blushed, or even smiled, but had regarded him as one man regards another, or as if he were indeed the middle-aged and feeble man her father pictured him.

"Why?" she asked, her blue eyes fixed gravely on his face.

"Because you seemed too kind-hearted to punish me severely," replied Clive. "I behaved very badly yesterday, I know; but I thought—I hoped—that you would forgive me. Have you?"

"I am here," she said; and the simplicity of the uncon-

"It's a good afternoon, isn't it?" he asked her. He meant for trout.

"Yes," she answered, "now the clouds have risen. Are you better to-day?"

"Oh, I'm all right, thanks," he said, as if the question were an unwelcome one.

"I'm glad," she returned in her direct fashion, "because we have a very long climb; and you might be tired."

"Tired! Try me!" he said, with a short laugh. "What about you? Are you so strong?"

She smiled.

"I am very strong," she replied; "and I am used to climbing and walking. Sometimes I walk right across the moors for miles; and I am often fishing all day; I am very seldom tired."

He glanced at her curiously. In her plainly made, homespun dress, with her straw hat and yellow gloves, she looked like a school-girl—a school-girl, with the vague charm of dawning womanhood emanating from her.

He thought of the two types of women he knew: the women of his own rank, languid, inert, incapable of physical exertion; of the other kind, the Lotties and Sophies of the theatres and music-halls, who, if they had ever dreamt of fishing, would have set about it in white-frilled petticoats and picture hats; and he smiled to himself. They—these other women—were all very well in their way; but how delightful, how satisfactory, this girl was!

She seemed quite unconscious of his scrutinising glance, and walked by his side, with her rod in her hand, and her basket slung over her shoulder, as free from embarrassment as if she were indeed another man.

"This is Moss Hill," she said; "there is a beautiful view from the top; and just on the other side is the Weir Water."

"Yes?" he responded, rather indifferently. "And what have you been doing since we met?"

"I have been at work, copying music," she said. "My father is blind—did I tell you?"

"No," he replied; "that's sad."

"Is it?" she asked, simply. "It does not seem so to me—because I am used to it, I suppose—and I do not think he minds, or thinks of it. And then I went down to the church this morning to practise."

"You work very hard," he said.

She stared at him.

"How can you say that? I thought you had overworked

yourself. And a man's work must be so much harder than a woman's."

Clive looked aside. He could not meet her clear, innocent eyes.

"Oh, ah, yes," he said; "but one doesn't like the idea of women working at all, you know."

She laughed softly.

"And yet so many women have to work."

"Have they?" he said, stupidly.

None of the women he knew—except the Lotties and Sophies—had to work; and their work was remarkably like play.

"Why, yes! If one is poor, one must work."

"And are you poor?" he asked, with the frankness of the man who has never known the lack of money.

"Yes—I think so," she answered. "All we have my father earns; and he has to work very hard. He composes something—a song, or a melody, nearly every day. You are not poor, I suppose?"

She put the question with girlish candour and simplicity; and Clive, bethinking him of his uncle, the marquis's, inadequate allowance, and his own mountain of debts, answered:

"Oh, yes, I am; very poor!"

"Never mind," she said, with a smile; "you will soon be well and strong again, and able to earn more money."

"Oh, yes; quite so," he responded, lamely.

Why should he undeceive her? Why should he say: "I am Lord Clive Marle, heir to the Marquisate of Doyne?" Why should he upset the serenity, the peace of this unexpected outing? He should be gone in a day or two; what need to disturb her with the knowledge of his rank and position?

They climbed the hill, talking as they climbed, and swiftly descended to the valley on the other side; so swiftly that Clive felt his breath coming thickly, and his heart, with its significant tick, tick, beating fast. But the girl at his side walked with perfect ease; and he envied her; yes, envied a woman for the first time in his life.

"There is the stream," she said. "Now, you had better put up your rod. Don't trouble about the flies; I have brought some—the proper ones."

He put his rod together, and she took out her well-worn fly-book and selected a March brown and a blue upright.

"There you are!" she cried, brightly. "These are our only Devon flies for this time of the year."

"Thanks!" he said, and he was putting them on when she stopped him.

"That's not the way! That may be all very well for Scotland, or—where was it?—Corsica; but it would not do for our Devon trout. They are much too shy. Let me!"

She took the flies from his hand, and, in doing so, her fingers got entangled with his. A thrill, a pleasant thrill, ran through Clive at her touch, but she seemed quite unmoved by the contact; she was thinking only of the flies and the fishing.

"That's the way to put them on here," she said. "Now, you go on—you are a visitor, stranger, you know—and I will follow."

"Can't we fish together?" asked Clive. He cared more for her company than catching any number of trout.

"Certainly not!" she said, decidedly. "We should spoil each other's sport. And I do want you to catch some fish."

"All right," he replied, resignedly, and walked on.

It was a lovely evening. The clouds still veiled the sun, but softly; and the golden light fell like a charm on the green meadows and the silver stream. A thrush and a finch sang one against the other, and the wild bees hummed amongst the flowers on the bank.

Clive whipped the stream industriously enough for a time, and caught some of the golden trout; then he thought of his companion, of the young girl who so strangely, so unconventionally, bore him company, and a dreamy mood fell upon him.

How different she was from the girls, the women, he knew! How frank and unself-conscious; and how beautiful! He tried to compare her with some of the famous beauties with whose names London had rung through all last season; but she came out first, and unbeaten.

"How Wally, and Brady, and the rest would rave about her!" he thought. "I'm glad they haven't seen her—don't know her. By George! I shall always remember her, always be grateful to her for livening up this forsaken corner of the earth! There's another fish—missed it! Why doesn't she come up? She is quite unlike any other girl. Fancy a girl keeping away from a man for an hour at a time! Wonderful! I suppose she wouldn't care a jot if I marched off and she never set eyes on me again! No; I'll swear she wouldn't!"

He waited beside a weir for some time in the hope that she would catch him up; but the fish were rising, and Beryl was busy with them, and had clean forgotten him.

He walked on, fishing as he went; and, presently, he began to get tired. He was weak still, and there was something in the moorland air that stole over him like a slumbrous spell.

He stopped and looked back again. She was not in sight; a bend of the valley shut her from him.

He stuck his rod in the ground, and threw himself on the grassy bank to wait for her; and in less than a couple of moments the slumbrous spell worked its way with him, and he fell asleep, into the sleep which he had wooed in vain all through the preceding night.

Beryl came along slowly. The fish were rising, and she was happy. She had quite forgotten her companion, and the sight of him stretched out on the bank almost startled her.

She stopped beside him, and looked down at him with a smile; but the smile grew from mirthful to pitying. He looked pale below his tan, and the dark shadows under his closed eyes were painfully obvious.

What a pity it was that he should have overworked himself!

She sank on the bank near him and gazed at the stream thoughtfully, and, not unnaturally, wondered who he was and what was his history.

Then she hoped that he had caught some fish. His basket was within a few inches of her hand, and, with an angler's curiosity, she gently and cautiously lifted the lid.

She smiled as she saw that he had not caught as many as she had, and was replacing the little piece of wood which fastened the lid, when something attracted her attention.

From a button-hole of his well-worn Norfolk jacket, into a side pocket, ran Olive's plain-linked watch-chain; attached to it were one or two trinkets—a seal, an anchor, and a locket. In his leaping from rock to rock, the latter had come open, and Beryl, from where she sat, caught a glimpse of a portrait. She looked aside, and up at the sky, and at the stream, half ashamed of having seen, even unintentionally, what was not intended for her sight; a thing so sacred as a portrait in a locket.

The minutes passed. Olive slept soundly, his shapely head upon his arm, his whole attitude one of surrender to the god of rest.

And she sat for a time with averted eyes. But, presently, she felt as if her gaze were being drawn to the open locket, as if she *must* look at it. She turned her eyes slowly, reluctantly, and bent her head nearer. So near that, at last, if he had been awake, he must have felt her breath upon his

cheek. So near that she could see the face of the portrait quite distinctly.

It was a pretty face—a fair, girlish one, with cupid lips and light blue eyes. It smiled up at her in a taunting, elfish way which irritated her, and she drew back, and was about to rise and move on, when Clive woke suddenly and looked up at her.

Her eyes were still fixed on the portrait, and he looked down and saw that the locket was open. For an instant he looked grave and thoughtful; then he closed the locket with an air of unconcern, and said:

“I’ve been asleep! I’m so sorry! I nearly lost my locket just now. That’s my—sister’s portrait!”

CHAPTER V.

“YOUR sister?” repeated Beryl. “She isn’t at all like you. I could not help seeing the portrait; the locket was wide open.”

“No; she isn’t like me,” said Clive. He did not offer to show her the portrait again, and went on quickly, as if to get away from the subject. “Aren’t you tired and thirsty?”

“Which means that you are!” she answered, with a smile.

“Guilty, my lord!” he assented. “Isn’t this the time when ladies are dying for their afternoon tea?”

“I suppose it is,” she replied, shading her eyes, and looking up at the sun. Sometimes I bring a small bag with a little kettle and some things for making tea; but I didn’t think of it this evening; but there’s a shepherd’s cot about a mile up the hill. Would you like to go so far? I know the people very well, and they will be delighted to give us some tea.”

“Come on, then,” he said, promptly.

They walked beside the stream for a while, and then began to climb the hill towards a tiny cottage; but suddenly Beryl caught his arm, and whispered quickly and eagerly:

“Hush! Crouch down!”

Wondering what on earth could be the matter, he crouched, and glanced at her. Her lovely face was flushed with eagerness, and her eyes glowed. He looked in the direction in which they were fixed, and presently heard a soft rustle in the bracken, and saw a noble stag pacing cautiously and yet with a cautious fearlessness down towards the stream. Looking this way and that, he stepped into the water and drank. Then Clive moved slightly, the stag heard him, threw up its antlered head and sniffed, and bounded like a thing of air up

the mountain-side, shaking the drops of water from its slimy legs like diamonds.

"Wasn't it beautiful?" exclaimed Beryl, with girlish delight. "You are fortunate. It is not often one sees them so close. That was a fine stag. Did you see it quite plainly?"

"Quite. Yes, I am fortunate," said Clive. "And it seems to me that I owe my good luck to you. If I hadn't met you in the church I should never have found the Weir Water or seen the stag."

"Or been tired out," she put in, smiling. "I'm not sure that all this exertion is good for you. Here is the cottage, and there is the shepherd's wife standing at the door. Isn't it a lovely spot? There is not a house for miles, and the nearest town is Lynmouth, miles and miles away. Nothing but moorland hills, and sometimes they are blotted out by the mists."

"I've heard of them," said Clive. "Are they as bad as they are painted?"

"They are as bad as they can be," replied Beryl. "They come on all in a moment, and are so thick that everything is wiped out—the whole world disappears, and you cannot see your hand before you!"

"You speak as if you were quite proud of them," said Clive, with a laugh.

She echoed the laugh softly.

"So we are. There's nothing like them anywhere else, not even in Scotland. People who get caught in them feel lost and bewildered. Sometimes," she went on with sudden gravity, "*they are* lost. Only last year a man was enveloped in a mist, and wandered down the wrong side of the hill and was never seen again."

Clive stared.

"Why, what became of him?"

"He got into a bog and was swallowed up—disappeared from the face of the earth."

"Pleasant!" he remarked. "I hope we sha'n't be visited by our friend, the mist."

She laughed.

"Oh, they do not often come at this time of the year, and there are no bogs near here. Besides, I should call the dogs. Listen! How they bark! Don't be afraid, they won't bite, and they only look savage."

Four magnificent collies, their eyes flashing, their manes bristling, came tearing down the hill towards them.

Clive put out his hand and patted one of them, but he broke

away and joined his fellows in leaping upon Beryl with the dog's loving welcome.

"They know me," she said; "I am here so often. Down, Karl! Down, Lark! Aren't they beautiful creatures? And they are so clever. This grey one went out by himself in that terrible snow-storm of two winters ago, and brought in all the sheep when the shepherd himself dared not venture ten yards from the cot."

Escorted by the dogs, they went up to the cottage. Beryl shook hands with the shepherd's wife, who greeted her with affectionate respect, and glanced shyly at Olive.

"I'm glad to see 'ee, miss," she said in broad Devon. "I've been watchin' 'ee at the fishin', and I've got 'ee some tea on the chance of 'ee comin' up. Do 'ee step in, sir."

As they entered the cottage, two rosy-cheeked, bare-footed children ran from the inner room, and sprang like the dogs at Beryl. She caught up the younger and held it up before her.

"Well, Lassie! And have you been making the kettle boil? and are you going to give me a piece of your scone?"

The child held the scone to Beryl's lips, and she pretended to nibble a piece, laughing softly.

Olive stood and looked at the scene with a feeling of surprise and novelty. He had never seen a girl like this. She looked so beautiful, so happy in her loving welcome, so fond of the child. And how strong she must be to hold it above her head, and at arm's-length! She made so exquisite a picture with her surroundings, that he could not remove his eyes; and, turning to him, she met his gaze. She was not in the very least embarrassed in its directness, but quite as free from self-consciousness as usual.

"This is Lassie, and that is Laddie. They have other and proper names, of course; but those are my names for them. Isn't he a handsome little fellow?" she added, in an undertone.

Olive nodded. He was fond of children, though he rarely took any notice of them; but before he knew what he was doing, he had coaxed the curly-headed mite on to his knee, and was talking to him about the dogs.

"I'll make the tea, Mrs. Hern," said Beryl. "I know you want to see to the cakes; I can smell them in the oven."

She took off her hat, artlessly careless of the tumbling of her soft, brown hair, and was immediately absorbed in her important task, talking the while to the shepherd's wife as if

Olive were not present. In fact, it seemed that she had forgotten him as completely as she had done during the fishing.

Olive talked to the children and the dogs; but his eyes and his attention wandered to the lovely face and graceful figure, never more graceful and bewildering than now, as she moved to and fro before the fire of clumps of red-hot peat, filling the teapot and setting out the cups and saucers.

For the first time for many a day Clive Marle felt honestly hungry; and when Mrs. Hern, with a shy blush, begged him to draw up to the table, he regarded the big loaf of home-made bread, the golden scones, and dish of thick cream with a smile.

"I may say that you have saved my life, Mrs. Hern," he remarked. "I was simply dying for something to eat, and so was Miss Frayne—but she'd rather perish than admit it."

"Indeed I wouldn't!" said Beryl, brightly. "Mrs. Hern, no one has such scones and cream as yours!"

"Would you mind telling me if you see that I am eating too much, Laddie?" said Clive.

The shepherd's wife glowed with delight at the kindness and appreciation of "the gentry;" and, if she had had her way, Clive would, in all seriousness, have eaten too much. While he was still hard at work at the tempting scones, Beryl sprang up and caught the little girl by the hand.

"Let us have one run down the hill, and leave these greedy people, Lassie!"

As the two ran out, the child shouting and laughing, the woman looked after them with a smile.

"Miss Beryl has a loving heart, sir!" she remarked, shyly.

"She certainly has," assented Clive.

"The childers think more of her than any one on earth, barring their father and me," said Mrs. Hern. "An' they'll watch for her comin' for days. But we're all alike in that regards on the moor; an' in the vale, too. But you know what she is, an' can understand it, sir."

Olive nodded.

"My good man says as he didn't believe much in angels till he saw Miss Beryl; not that he's a bad man, sir, by no means; it's only his way of talking. An' she is an angel; one o' God's own." Her face grew grave and her voice reverent as she said it; then she smiled. "An' you're from London, sir? A relation of Miss Beryl's, I expect?"

"No; I'm sorry to say not," said Clive.

She looked at him earnestly and a little shyly.

"Perhaps you're her sweetheart, sir?" she said, with the intense simplicity of the remote country-side.

Olive felt the blood rush to his face for a moment; then he shook his head.

"No. I wish I were!" he declared.

The woman curtsied, and looked from side to side with painful embarrassment.

"I beg your pardon, sir," she stammered. "It's foolish an' free o' me—"

"No, no; not at all," said Olive, quickly. "It was only too flattering. Besides, I'm afraid Miss Beryl has a sweetheart, or several, already."

The woman shook her head.

"No, sir; I'm thinkin' there's no one good enough for her hereabouts," she answered, as proudly as if Beryl belonged to her, or as if Beryl were a princess.

"By George! you're right!" exclaimed Olive, warmly.

"There's no equal of her here," said Mrs. Hern. "Up in Lunnun, now, perhaps—"

She broke off as Beryl ran in with Lassie on her shoulder.

"We must be going!" she said, breathlessly.

Olive rose and got his hat, and, under pretence of shaking hands with Laddie, slipped a sovereign into his chubby palm.

"Thank you for the tea, Mrs. Hern," said Olive. "I haven't enjoyed anything so much for weeks."

He shook hands with her and gave Lassie a kiss, and Beryl, who had not uttered a word of thanks, as if the hospitality were a matter of course, led the way out.

"And yet the rich pity the poor! I suppose they are poor?" said Olive, thoughtfully.

"Oh, yes," replied Beryl, cheerfully. "I suppose Hern's wages are twelve or thirteen shillings a week."

"Good Lord!"

"And there's the cottage and the garden, and a little extra at harvest time. Lord Westley lets him do a little work for the farmers in the valley—"

Olive started slightly.

"What name did you say?" he asked.

"Lord Westley, do you mean?" she said. "Do you know him?"

"I've heard of him," he replied, casually.

"That is all we ever do," said Beryl, with a smile. "He is an absentee landlord, and never comes here. It is years since any of the tenants have seen him—some never have;

and yet he owns all this," she swept her hand round comprehensively.

"Well, he couldn't very well come," said Olive. "He's dead!"

"Oh, yes, I remember! Well, it applies to his heir—oh, isn't it a young lady, his daughter?"

"Yes, I think so," said Olive. "Halloo! what's the matter? You've forgotten something, I suppose." For Mrs. Hern's voice was heard behind them, calling earnestly, "Miss Beryl! Miss Beryl!" and she was running down the winding track.

She came up to them, and held out her hand.

"The gentleman made a mistake, Miss Beryl," she said, breathlessly. "He's given Laddie this instead of a shillin', I expect."

Olive looked awkwardly at the sovereign in her outstretched palm.

"Confound the boy! Why couldn't he have kept quiet until we were out of sight?" he thought; but he said, with only the faintest tinge of embarrassment:

"Eh? Oh, ah, yes! Thank you, Mrs. Hern."

He found a shilling, and took the sovereign and dropped it hurriedly into his pocket.

"It isn't necessary, sir," said the woman, shyly drawing back.

"Oh, come, Mrs. Hern! I was a boy myself, and liked a tip whenever I could get it," replied Olive, and the woman reluctantly took the shilling.

"It'll buy him the whip he's always hankerin' after, Miss Beryl," she said. "It's very kind of the gentleman; but, indeed, it isn't necessary!"

"You ask Laddie's opinion as to that!" put in Olive, with a happy touch of *bonhomie*.

"How could you be so careless?" asked Beryl, rebukingly, when the woman had run up out of hearing.

"Don't know, I'm sure," he said, penitently. "It comes of keeping one's coin mixed up in one pocket."

"If it had been any one less honest than Mrs. Hern, you would have lost it; and a sovereign is a great deal," said Beryl, gravely.

"Yes," he assented, "so it is!"

"And, as she said, you need not have given them anything. The people about here are really hospitable and very proud. Mrs. Hern is too sweet-tempered to take offence; but you

must be more careful in the future, or you will hurt their feelings."

"I will," said Olive. "I will be more careful!"

"You'd better sort out your money," added Beryl.

"Yes," he assented, meekly, and obediently took out a handful of silver and gold.

Beryl looked at it with surprise.

"Why, what a large sum! How careless of you! I suppose it is all you have for your holiday?"

"Yes," he said, busy separating the coins.

"How careless! My father is just the same. I suppose all men are alike."

"I suppose so. We are a helpless lot."

"Haven't you a purse?" she demanded, as if she were a sister, and regarding him gravely as he slipped the gold into the small pocket of his Norfolk jacket.

"I'm afraid I haven't."

"She put her hand into her pocket and drew out a plain leather purse, and extracted a few shillings, then held it out to him.

"I'll lend you this—or you can keep it; I have another," she said, quite simply.

Olive kept his eyes fixed on the purse.

"Thank you very much," he said, trying to speak as unconcerned as she had done; "I'll take care of it."

"Well, you'd better, or you'll lose all your holiday money," she answered, "and then you'll have to go back before your time, and before you are quite well."

"Which would be a pity!" he said, as he stowed the purse away in his breast-pocket, where it lay snug and warm like a live thing.

"Why, yes," she agreed, quite simply.

The perfect innocence and unconsciousness with which she had made the gift overwhelmed him, and he walked beside her in silence for some minutes. They came to the roads, and she picked hers up at once.

"Go first," she said, "and just fish the pools; there will not be time for anything more. Don't wait for me when you get down to the end."

He set off; but though he lingered as much as he could, she did not catch him up, and he disobeyed her by waiting at the meeting of the roads.

"You've done fairly well," she said, looking into his basket, "but you will catch more when you remember to keep

out of sight. They are very shy. What a lovely evening! It must be late! Good-night."

She held out her slim hand, browned by many such days, and Olive took it and looked at her with a novel kind of gravity in his eyes.

"Good-night," he said. "I should like to thank you—" He was warned by the surprised expression which began to dawn in the lovely eyes. "Good-night!"

He had hard work to keep from pressing her hand; but he succeeded in restraining the desire, and with a little nod and smile she went on her way. He leant against the gate and watched her until she was out of sight, then he went up to his room and opened the window.

He could not see her, but he heard her voice. She was singing as freely, as untroubled, as one of the birds in the garden. She had forgotten him, no doubt.

He took out the purse and looked at it, turning it over in his hands. It was difficult to believe that this girl, whom he had met only two nights ago, had given it to him. Then he began to change his things slowly.

As he took out his watch and unfastened the chain, he saw the locket.

The watch he usually carried had stopped in the night, and he had taken this one, with the chain and trinkets attached, from the jewel-box which Parsons had packed. He had not worn it for—how many years, two?

He opened the locket and looked at the fair, too fair, face, with bent brows and tightening lips.

"What made me put the thing on?" he muttered. "And what made me lie to her? It sticks in my throat even now. If she only knew the truth! What would she do? Shrink from me? No; she wouldn't understand."

He closed the locket, and flung the whole thing into the jewel-box with something between a groan and a curse.

CHAPTER VI.

OLIVE slept like a top that night, and in the morning woke with a novel sensation of strength and brightness. To Mrs. Jennings' infinite satisfaction and delight, he ate a good breakfast, and when he went out into the fragrant air he drew a long breath and expanded his chest, as if life had suddenly grown worth living.

There is a magic power in the mixture of sea and moorland air, and Sir William had shown his usual wisdom in sending

Lord Clive Marle into it. But it was not the magic air that had effected so quick a change in Clive, though he himself put it all down to climatic influence. He looked down the valley with quite a new feeling; and to his surprise felt no longer bored or consumed with the desire to fly the "God-forsaken" spot and rush up to London. Instead, he thought of the hot pavement of Pall Mall, the dusty gravel paths of St. James's Park, the noisy suppers and card-parties at Lord Wally's or Sir Terence Brady's, with something like a shudder. How wearisome and vapid it all seemed, contrasted with the simple, health-giving life in this enchanted valley!

Enchanted; yes, that was what it was; and he felt the spell working within him.

It was too hot and bright for fishing, and he set off for a walk. Half unconsciously he went down the valley and climbed the side of the hill where Hill Cote stood. Was it in the hope of seeing something of Beryl Frayne? If so, he was doomed to disappointment, for she was not visible.

But as he paused on the wooded slope just below the cottage he heard the sound of the violin. It was being played by a master hand; and as the exquisite music floated down to him he wondered whether the player was Beryl herself.

He left the valley and made his way up to the top of the cliff; and he thought of her, and only her, as he tramped along—not sauntered, as of old, but tramped; for the breeze, coming softly from the sea, was like a tonic, and he felt the blood stirring in his veins as he had not felt it—for how long?

He called up the lovely face, with its blue-grey eyes, and its setting of full, soft brown hair with its sunny curls breaking in silky waves on the white brow; and the mobile lips, now grave, now smiling, as they expressed the feeling of their owner; he looked mentally upon the girlish, graceful figure in its plain, workman-like homespun; and he remembered and went over nearly every word she had said in the clear voice which, for all its clearness, was so sweet and musical.

Once or twice he took out the purse she had so innocently given him, and he smiled as he looked at it and thought of the sisterly way in which she had chidden him and bidden him be "more careful."

What would she say if she knew that he was not the over-worked professional man or City clerk which she supposed him to be? What would she say if she knew that he was—well, Lord Clive Marle, with Lord Clive Marle's reputation?

"She must never know," he said to himself, moodily. "She need not. I can keep her ignorant until I go. I need

"Dinner is ready, father," she said, and she drew her arm within his.

"You will excuse me preceding you—I am blind, Mr. Marle," said Olive's host.

The young man followed father and daughter into the dining-room. It was small, but it was as indicative of refinement as the drawing-room. The dinner was simple enough. They were waited on by one maid-servant only, but Olive thought that he had never more thoroughly enjoyed a meal. He was hungry, honestly hungry, and the room, lit by the red rays of the setting sun, seemed to him like a poem. He could not help comparing it with the garish London rooms, with their innumerable electric lights and faint, cloying perfumes; and he wondered how he could have borne the latter.

And only a few days ago he was hankering after them!

Beryl waited on her father throughout the dinner, cut up his food, and filled his glass with wine. Olive noticed that it was Italian Chianti. Now and again she laid her hand upon his arm lovingly, protectingly; and Olive thought that it was worth being blind to receive such attention.

Sebastian Frayne was evidently pleased, and a little excited by the visit of a stranger, and, after a while, he talked freely. He seemed to know something of London and London society, and Olive was in mortal terror lest the blind man should remember his name and rank; but his apprehension wore off as the dinner proceeded and Mr. Frayne evinced no signs of knowledge.

"Now you may go, Beryl," he said, as the maid placed a fresh bottle of Chianti in front of her master. "Mr. Marle will like a smoke. Give him a cigarette."

"I've promised to avoid the subtle cigarette," answered Olive, as he opened the door for Beryl. He filled his pipe, and smoked thoughtfully, dreamily.

It seemed to him, as he looked at the blind man and round the tiny room, that he had drifted into another world.

Just about this time those of his friends who were perforce remaining in London would be setting forth for the Empress or the Tivoli, with a supper and cards to follow. And he was here sitting, hobnob with a blind man, smoking a pipe, and drinking cheap Italian wine. *Was it real, or was it only a dream?*

Sebastian Frayne talked of himself principally; of his profession and the work he had done—all professionals are given to this—and Olive listened listlessly until he began to speak of his daughter.

"Beryl is a musician, Mr. Marle," he said, with a burst of confidence engendered by the wine and cigarettes; "a born musician! You shall hear her presently. But she will never know Fame. There is a reason—"

He stopped abruptly.

"Will you take some more wine?"

Clive declined, and Mr. Frayne rose. Clive offered him his arm, and they passed into the drawing-room.

"Are you fond of music?" asked Mr. Frayne.

Clive replied in the affirmative, and with a pleased nod Mr. Frayne motioned Beryl to the piano.

"Sing my last song, Beryl," he said; "the 'Good-bye, Love.'"

Quite simply, and without any of the usual hesitation or excuse, Beryl went to the piano and sang.

Olive leant back in one of the well-worn chairs, and listened like one spell-bound. Her voice was music itself, a limpid stream of melody which stirred the heart and overwhelmed the senses.

He could not find a word in which to thank her; indeed, before he could do so, her father said:

"Good. That E was a trifle sharp, Beryl, was it not? Now play the 'Corsair's Farewell'—mine also, Mr. Marle. The violin, Beryl."

She took up the violin and played, and Clive asked himself which music was the sweeter: that of her voice or the instrument. But he felt a longing to hear the former again.

Her father nodded approvingly, and Clive managed to get out a "Thank you."

"Mr. Marle would, perhaps, like to hear my sonata, Beryl," said Mr. Frayne. She put down the violin, and led him to the organ; and the blind man began to play.

Beryl went to the open window, and Clive followed her on to the terraced gravel walk. The gracious, beautiful presence, the strains of the music, were acting like a spell, a magic spell. He longed for a smile from her, a touch of her hand, with a wistful longing which was quite new to him; for it was chastened by a reverence which was almost fear.

What had come to him? A few days ago, and were this another woman, he would have found no difficulty in whispering the soft speeches which come so easily to men of his kind; would even have ventured to touch the long, shapely hand which rested on the rough, rustic fence. But, as he glanced at the lovely face, as she listened dreamily to the music, it seemed to him that he could no more dare to attempt to flirt

with her than he would dare to seize her in his arms and kiss her.

And yet she was only a girl, little more than a school-girl, ignorant of the world! Perhaps it was her very innocence and unsuspecting fearlessness which awed him. He could not tell; he only knew that his heart was beating fast with her nearness, with the sound of her regular breathing, with the far-away look of the eyes which were now blue-grey, now violet, as the stars were reflected in them.

"Isn't that beautiful?" she murmured, without removing her eyes from the stars.

Clive knew she meant the music.

"Yes," he said, "but I liked your song better; I'm no judge, you know. Are you going fishing to-morrow?"

"I don't know; perhaps," she replied, with an indifference which only increased his interest in her. It was evident she was neither thinking of him nor had any great desire for his company.

"If you were, I was going to ask you to let me go with you," he said, humbly.

"I will see in the morning. Yes, if it should be a fine day; of course, I mean a cloudy day. Weather goes by contrary with anglers."

"We might go in the evening, if it should be too bright during the day," he suggested.

"Very well," she said, simply. "We ought to go to Simonsbath; but that would be too far for you, as you are not strong."

"Oh, no; it wouldn't," he answered, quickly. "I am all right now, I assure you. I am quite a different man from what I was when I first came here."

There was an eagerness in his tone which she had not heard before, and which attracted her attention; and she turned her eyes upon him with almost a curious intentness.

"Yes," she said; quite innocently, frankly, but with a little puzzled note in her voice, "you *are* quite different. Why is that, I wonder? Trentishoe must be a marvellous place to change you so quickly. It must be the air."

"Yes; it's the air, no doubt," he replied, looking straight before him, lest she should see the expression which he knew was glowing in his eyes.

"You will soon be quite well and strong, and able to go back to work again," she said, with a smile, which positively hurt him. "You will be very glad."

"I—I needn't go just yet," he remarked; "I've got rather

a long holiday. But I'd better go back to the farm now, for I must be keeping you up."

He went into the drawing-room, and wished Mr. Frayne good-night. The blind man held his hand for a moment.

"Pray come and see us again, Mr. Marle," he said. "We are very unconventional folk—we live out of the world, you see—and will not expect you to stand on ceremony. If you are fond of music—well, we can, at least, always give you that."

"Thanks; I shall be glad," returned Olive, gratefully.

The white-clad figure was still leaning over the wooden rail, and she turned to bid him good-night with a frank, serene smile.

Olive held her hand for a moment longer than was necessary.

"You can go out this way—you turn to your right," she said. "Good-night."

He went down the garden path, then paused and looked up. She was still standing there, and Olive, as he gazed at the dim, white figure shining softly in the sweet summer night, thought suddenly of the picture of an angel he had seen in some gallery; an angel floating in the twilight, with its holy, placid eyes fixed on the world below.

He went down the path, and got into the road. Then he took off his hat and passed his hand across his brow.

What had come to him? Why should he feel a faint, sad sensation at his heart on leaving her, and count the hours till their meeting on the morrow? Could it be possible that—that he was in love with Beryl Frayne?

He tried to laugh, but the laugh was a pronounced failure. He tried to remember whether he had ever felt in exactly this way before; but he could not. He had fancied himself in love with some few women, had flirted with many, but the fancy had passed away; whereas he felt to-night as if the world only contained one woman—a girl with the frank, innocent eyes of a child, the serenity and purity of an angel.

"Good Lord!" he murmured. "I feel as if I were bewitched. It—it must be the air. Now, if the marquis were here, and could see me, he would smile and advise me to go. Yes; that would be wise. But I could not go."

The night was a perfect one; too perfect to permit of bed, and Olive paced slowly and thoughtfully along the high-road.

"I'll wire Parsons to send me a couple of horses and the dog-cart," he said to himself. "Perhaps she'll let me take her for a drive now and again. And I'll send for some of the

latest music. How beautiful she would look with a string of pearls round that warm, white neck! What a fool I am! As if she would accept a string of pearls, or even glass beads, from me! She said I might go soon; and evidently didn't care whether I went or stayed. I am simply nothing to her—nothing. And why the devil should you be, you vain idiot?" he apostrophised himself, angrily. "Do you think because a parcel of London women are ready to smile on you that this pure-minded girl— How different she is from them all! I wonder what would happen to me if she really were one day to smile on me as some other women have done; if she were to just let me kiss her hand. I should go half mad with happiness. Ah, well, there's no fear of my losing my senses; she'll never do it, never! To some other man, some fellow worthy of her; not an infernal scamp like myself."

He broke off with a sigh, and seating himself on the bank beside the road, took out his pipe.

As he was lighting it, there came the sound of wheels, and the sharp beat of horses' feet.

"A pair, and a good pair," he muttered—for Clive Marle knew the sound.

Presently he saw a cloud of dust on the top of the hill, and a moment or two afterward a closed carriage came swiftly toward him.

"A private carriage," he said. "Some one coming from a dinner-party. Doesn't look like a country affair, though. That's London, I'll swear, from the nags to the coachman's buttons."

The carriage came abreast of Clive; then, as the light from its near lamp fell upon him, the coachman pulled up as shortly as he could.

"Can you tell me whether I'm on the right road for Coombe. my man?" he enquired, with a pure Cockney accent.

Clive rose.

"Keep as far as the sign-post, and then turn to the left," he said.

The coachman touched his hat.

"Beg pardon, sir; mistook you for a tramp! Thank you, sir. Can you tell me how many miles?"

"I can't, quite," said Clive. "About twenty, I fancy."

As he spoke, a lady, who was lying back in the carriage, woke, and, with a start, sat up.

"Heaven and earth, I must be dreamin'!" she said to herself. She passed her hand over her eyes and leant forward.

She was young and fair, marvellously fair, with blue eyes,

and soft, fluffy hair all crushed and touzled by the web-like Indian shawl which she had drawn over her bare head in place of the latest thing in hats which lay on the seat beside her. A beautiful face, and yet with something lacking in it. A face to admire, perchance to love—for a time; but not a face to trust.

With a yawn she laid one ungloved hand on the edge of the window—it was covered with rings, which sparkled in the red glow of the lamp—and leant forward.

The light was full upon the tall, upright figure in the road, and as her eyes rested upon it, her fair face flushed hotly and then turned pale.

"I'm not dreamin'—it is—it is him!" she gasped. She drew back swiftly, and drawing the shawl over her head so as to conceal her face, peered from behind it, and listened eagerly, her bosom heaving with excitement.

"Well, that will be far enough," said the coachman. "I've come from Minehead. If I could get a drink of water—"

"There's a pond at the bottom of the next hill," replied Olive, with the interest of a lover of horses. "Take 'em up quietly; they look hot."

"They are a bit. Thank you, and good-night, sir," said the coachman.

He let the horses go, and the carriage rolled smoothly past. Olive glanced at the window, but caught a glimpse only of the slight girlish figure which had shrunk into the nearest corner, with its face shrouded by the shawl.

She lay back for quite a couple of minutes after he had been left behind, then she sat up, tore the shawl away as if stifling, and drew a long breath.

"Clive Marle in this God-forsaken place! What's he doin', I should like to know? Some devilry, I'll bet. And I'll find out before long, or my name's not Patsy Pryde! Thank the Lord he didn't see me! It was a near thing, though!" she added, as she dropped back with a half-vacant, half-mocking laugh.

Certainly, if he had seen her, Olive would have recognised her, for the fair face was that of the portrait Beryl had seen in the open locket.

And it was his money which had bought the spanking horses, the carriage in which Miss Patsy Pryde rode so luxuriously, the elegant travelling dress she wore so gracefully, and the diamonds which she flashed with such generous splendour.

CHAPTER VII

BERYL and Olive met every day.

How bald the statement reads, and yet how much it means! Sometimes they went fishing, sometimes for long walks over the hills and through the valleys of the lovely Devon country. No walk was now too long for Olive Marle, for he had regained his health and strength in a most marvellous manner. Sir William himself would have been surprised at the change in his patient, and would scarcely have recognised in the stalwart, alert figure and the bronzed face, radiant with health, the pale, inert young man who only a short time ago had leaned back in his chair and scoffed at the physician's solemn warning.

And the change was not only physical, but mental and spiritual. Olive Marle had become a new man. To him it seemed that he had never really lived until now. He looked back upon the past with a commingling of amazement and loathing; amazement that he could ever have found any pleasure in folly and vice, and loathing for everything connected with his past career of dissipation.

He felt as if he should never want to leave the valley again; as if he should be quite content to remain there, leading this Arcadian existence, as long as he lived. And yet, with all this contentment, he was conscious of a sense of wistful restlessness. He was only happy when he was with Beryl; when he was away from her he longed for the hour when he should see her again. She was never absent from his thoughts, and he knew that he loved her as a man loves only once in his life.

And yet he dared not tell her so. There was something sacred in her innocence, in her unconsciousness of the state of his feelings. Sometimes he wondered whether she guessed how it was with him, whether she suspected the ardent love that burned in his bosom with a fire that warmed while it consumed him; for eyes can speak eloquently though the tongue be silent, and he felt that every touch conveyed a caress and told his love while it pleaded for hers in return.

But Beryl was quite unconscious. And yet the glimmer of a new happiness was dawning upon her. She knew that she was glad when they met. She watched for him from the terrace, and he never came but a smile lit up the lovely eyes and curved the soft, red lips. She went about the house, singing

softly, and with a new note in the beautiful voice, a note of which she was ignorant, but which her father's keen ears detected.

"You seem very happy, Beryl," he said, one morning.

She started slightly; then, as she put her arm round his neck and kissed him, she said, with a little surprise:

"Am I, father? I think I am. Why should I not be? I have everything to make me happy."

"Everything," he said.

"Why, yes!" she responded. "I have you and the music. And the weather is so lovely. Have we ever had such a fine summer! I don't think Trentishoe ever looked so beautiful, and I am sure there must be more flowers this year than usual. Listen how the birds sing, father!"

"There's some one coming up the path," he said.

She went quickly to the terrace.

"It is Mr. Marle," she told him. "We are going fishing over at Knightford."

"It is too far," he said.

"Oh, but we are going to drive. Mr. Marle has borrowed the Jennings' jingle, I suppose. I'll run and get my things. Tell him I shall not be a minute."

She was down again almost before Clive had climbed up to the house, and stood before him with a soft, radiant smile upon her face. A light shot up into Clive's eyes which he was glad the blind man could not see.

"Take your water-proofs," said Mr. Frayne. "There is a feeling of rain in the air."

"All right, sir," replied Clive, as they went down the path.

"I've got plenty of wraps in the trap."

When they reached the lane at the bottom, Beryl stared with surprise; for instead of the jingle she had expected, there stood a handsome dog-cart with a magnificent chestnut in the shafts.

"Why, whose is this?" she exclaimed.

"Oh, it's mine," said Clive, in an off-hand way. "I had it sent down from London."

She went and patted the horse, and looked from it to the costly cart. Ignorant of the world as she was, she felt that such a turn-out did not usually belong to a poor man.

"What a beautiful horse!" she said; "and what a splendid turn-out altogether! I thought you said you were quite poor?"

"Oh, I want it for—for my business," Clive faltered out. "I travel a good deal. I've got a saddle-horse down too. Let me help you up."

She accepted the explanation in all innocence, and he put her in her seat and carefully arranged a light dust-wrap round her; then the boy who had been holding the horse let go. The chestnut was nearly thorough-bred, and a perfect trapper, and it went straight forward over hill and dale at a pace which brought the color to Beryl's face and a happy light to her eyes.

"This is delightful!" she cried. "How nice it must be to be well enough off to own such a horse and such a cart!"

"Oh, ah, yes!" said Clive, casually.

His heart was beating fast. It was the first time she had been so close to him. Her arm touched his; her dress swept against his legs; when she turned to speak to him he could feel her sweet breath turned upon his cheek. Her nearness and her perfect unconsciousness stirred the blood in his veins and confused and bewildered him.

He knew that the hand which held the reins trembled, and he wondered that she did not notice it. But, indeed, she was absorbed in the delight of the drive, and had no suspicions that the man beside her was throbbing with a passionate desire to exclaim, "I love you! I love you!"

The fifteen miles which lay between them and the solitary farm-house at which they were to put up the horse passed as if they were but five.

"Are we here already?" she said, with something like a tone of regret. "How short the distance seems to have been; and it is usually so long."

"We've come quickly," answered Clive, as he helped her down; and he dared not look into her eyes as he held her hand, lest she should see the passion burning there.

As usual, they received a warm welcome from the farmer's wife, who seemed unable to let them go to their fishing until Beryl promised to come back to tea.

They went down the hill into the valley through which the stream wound like a silver ribbon. The way was steep, and the London girl would in all probability have broken her ankle if she had been foolish enough to attempt the pace which Beryl accomplished so easily. Clive himself could not, a fortnight ago, have kept up with her; but he found no difficulty in doing so now, and he sprang from boulder to boulder with the ease and firmness of perfect health and strength. Every now and then, whenever they came to a particularly big rock, he offered her his hand; but she very seldom took it, and reminded him that she had gone down this same hill by herself scores of times.

"You must have felt lonely sometimes," he said.

"Oh, yes," she replied, brightly and innocently. "It is nicer to have somebody with one."

As usual, she would not allow Clive to put up her rod, and, as usual, she sent him on in front.

"We will meet at that clump of withies," she said, pointing up the stream.

"I sha'n't miss you?" suggested Clive, anxiously.

"Oh, no; you forget you have the lunch in your basket! I shall be sure to be there."

She laughed happily, and he heard her singing softly as he went round the next bend of the river. He could scarcely keep his attention fixed on the fishing. He was asking himself what he should do. He wanted to tell her that he loved her. And yet how could he? There were many reasons why he could not tell Beryl Frayne that he loved her, why he could not ask her to be his wife; but one would suffice, and it was this: He could not ask her to be his wife without telling her who he was, without telling her of his past, and he shrank with a shudder from the mere thought of such a revelation. And even if he could bring himself to conceal his past from her, the attempt at concealment would be futile. He was too well known in the world outside this enchanted valley for her to remain ignorant of his past history; some "good-natured friend" would be sure to open her eyes, and then—His face paled and his heart sank as he pictured the look of surprise and horror, and, perhaps, loathing, which would come into her face when she learned the truth, the true character of the man she had married.

Then suddenly the alternative broke upon him like a cold rain. If he could not tell her of his love and ask her to be his wife, he must leave her. He could not go on like this any longer. Leave her! At the mere thought the light seemed to go out from the day and the blue sky to darken. She had become the life of his life, the one woman in the world, the one thing worth living for. Without her his future would be blank and joyless. Without her—The rod shook in his hand, and he wiped the perspiration from his face, which had become suddenly pale.

"Let me suffer as I may," he said to himself; "I must go. I've been a coward and a cur to stop so long. But, thank God, she has no suspicion of how it is with me! I will go before it is too late. She will be sorry, I dare say, just as one friend is sorry at losing another. Perhaps she will often look back and think of the times we have had together, and

think that they were very pleasant, and perhaps—perhaps she will remember me, until—until—some fellow comes along, some fellow who is not an unlucky devil of a black sheep like myself, but more worthy of her. Why didn't I meet her years ago before I came to London and started on that cursed life there? Why didn't I— Oh, what's the use of wishing? I can't wipe out the past any more than the nigger can wash himself white or the leopard change his spots. No; I'll go."

He strode on along the rough bank, making no pretence of fishing, and presently reached their meeting-place; and there he flung himself down and waited for her.

Soon he heard her light footstep, and she stood before him.

Her face was flushed slightly with the exercise and the sun's rays, and a happy light beamed in the blue-grey eyes; indeed, they were violet now as they rested on him; then she looked suddenly grave as she saw the colour of his face.

"Are you tired?" she asked.

"No, no," he answered, busily taking out the lunch.

"I thought you looked a little pale," she said. "I am always suspicious of this suddenly acquired strength of yours; it is so sudden and soon after your illness. It is so easy for an invalid to be too confident, and overdo it."

Clive laughed almost bitterly.

"You need have no misgiving," he said. "I am as strong as I look; I am better and more fit than I have been for years. See here!"

Quite simply and without any theatrical striving after effect, he reached up to one of the branches of the tree, gripped it with both hands, and broke it off. It was a feat which he could not have performed for some years past, even if it had been to save his life.

Beryl looked at him with the amazement and the half-unconscious admiration which all women extend to a performance of that kind.

"You must be very strong," she said in a low voice.

Clive flushed, half ashamed of the action.

"Oh, it's half a trick," he replied. "I shall be stronger still after lunch. See there; there's a boulder for you to lean against."

She sank down on the thick heather, and he opened the packet of sandwiches and handed them to her. She leant back and took off her hat. The sun shone upon her gold-brown hair and made the gold more vivid and the brown a brighter hue; the lines and curves of her supple figure, as she lay back in girlish *abandon*, were grace itself. Her beauty

made Olive thrill and tremble. The last time! he thought; and the thought seemed to choke him. He felt as if he must take the little brown hand hidden in the deep heather and put it to his lips, and say:

"Dearest, this is 'good-bye.' I am going because I love you, because I am not worthy to ask you to be my wife. I shall never forget you, never while life lasts. Try and remember me for a little while, try and think of me when you come along the stream here or walk across the moor."

She could not see his face, or she might have been startled; as it was, she was quite happy, and she talked as freely and unconsciously as usual. Now and again, in a pause, she sang softly, just as the birds sang above their heads, for very joy in life and freedom from care.

Then suddenly her song ceased; she uttered an exclamation, a swift note of pain and alarm, and snatched her hand from its bed of heather.

"What is the matter?" asked Olive; and he sprang to his feet, for her face had gone perfectly white, and a faint look of terror was in her eyes, which stared beyond him vacantly.

"What is it? Tell me!"

She had risen, and stood holding her hand behind her.

"Something has stung, bitten me," she said.

"Where?" he asked, quickly, anxiously.

"In the wrist; it was in the heather. See what it was."

Olive sprang to the spot where she had been sitting, and looked round eagerly. He saw the heather stirred a few feet from where her hand had rested, and heard the unmistakable hiss of a snake. He caught up a stone, tracked the thing cautiously until it glided into the open, then dropped the stone on it and set his heel upon its head.

"What is it?" asked Beryl in a low voice.

"A snake," he replied, trying to speak calmly and easily.

"I thought so," she said. "What kind is it? Is it a green one?"

"No," he replied; "it's brown."

"Let me see it," she said, as she came towards him. She bent over the thing and looked at it, then her level brows contracted, and a little shiver ran through her. "It is an adder," she said, quite quietly.

Olive bit his lip and steadied his voice.

"How do you know?" he asked. "I don't think it is. It is one of those other brown things—what do you call them?—slow-worms."

"No," she said; "it is an adder. I have seen lots of

them. I know it by the V-mark on its head. Don't you see it?"

He saw it plainly enough, and as he remembered all the stories he had heard of the fatal effects of an adder's bite, the blood seemed to recede from his heart. He turned his suddenly white face to her.

"Does it matter?" he asked. "Is there any harm—danger?"

She tried to smile.

"I don't quite know," she replied. "I think there is. It is supposed to be mortal. I remember—one of the Jennings' farm-boys was bitten by a viper, and he—he died. But it might not have been of the bite."

Olive's heart seemed to cease beating.

"Let me see your hand," he said, almost roughly.

She held it out to him. Just above the wrist, at a spot which the short sleeve had left bare, and between two delicately blue veins, was a small red mark. The blood rushed to Olive's face; he was filled with anxiety for her safety and loathing of the beast which had inflicted the injury.

"It has bitten you, I see," he said. "What is to be done?"

"I don't know," she answered, with a faint and tremulous laugh. "It ought to be cut out or burnt, I suppose."

Instinctively Olive felt for his knife, then he drew his hand from his pocket and shuddered.

"I couldn't do it," he said, almost inaudibly.

"Give me the knife," she said; then she, too, shuddered. "No, and I couldn't do it."

Olive stood still holding the hand and trying to remember all that he had read of snake-bites, their results, and their cures; but every remedy which he recollected was beyond their reach.

He looked up at the lovely face, now white, the eyes wide open and half vacant with the dread which she strove to conceal with a woman's brave smile.

"Do you feel any pain?" he asked.

"There is a queer stinging about the spot," she replied. "But it hasn't gone up the arm yet. I suppose it will go up presently and wind about until it reaches my heart. Oh, no, no! I don't believe there's any harm in it."

"The Jennings' boy died," he said, hoarsely. "The place is swelling already. Come down to the stream and let me bathe it."

She let him lead her down to the river with a helpless con-

finding in his strength, a tender obedience to his command, which she would not have yielded an hour ago. Still holding her hand in his strong fingers, he knelt beside the running, bubbling water which so short a time ago had sung so musically, but now seemed to roar with a sullen, insidious threat.

He bathed the place, and she looked down at him dreamily.

"It is swelling," she said. "How virulent the poison must be. I—I wonder whether it is a painful death."

He sprang to his feet, his face flushed, his eyes glowing. At that instant there had flashed across his mind the old story which every schoolboy knows, of the queen who had sucked the poison from the arrow-wound in her husband's side.

He gripped her hand and bent his head. Beryl shrank back.

"What are you going to do?" she asked.

"I am going to draw out the poison," he said.

"No!" she exclaimed, sharply, swiftly.

"But I am," he said, quietly.

"No, no!" she exclaimed again; and she tried to wrench her hand from his grip.

"Keep still," he said, quietly, but with that tone of command which goes straight to a woman's heart.

"You shall not!" she cried, breathlessly. "It may be dangerous. I will not let you do it!"

He laughed shortly, and gripped her arm just below the elbow with his other hand. She was held as if in a vice; but still she tried to struggle.

"Be still!" he said. "I mean to do it. I don't know whether it's any use—it may be all romance; but I'll try it."

CHAPTER VIII.

He looked up at her for an instant. His passionate love burnt in his eyes, and as her own met them they fell. A tremor passed over her. She felt powerless to resist, incapable even of a single movement. His eyes, with their burning light, held her even more firmly than his iron grip.

"Oh, don't! Oh, don't!" she pleaded. "The danger—the danger!" She tried to free herself, and her lithe body writhed away from him.

He held her firmly.

"Keep still!" he said, fiercely. "There is no danger to me, and I care not if there be!"

He bent his head, and she felt his warm lips upon her arm. There was a strange sensation, as if her life's blood were being

drawn from her. A faintness, an exquisite faintness of pain and joy subtly combined, overwhelmed her; her eyes closed, her body swayed to and fro. He seemed to be drawing the very life from her being—and yet she did not mind.

She made no effort to resist him now. She was powerless, helpless. Her eyes, half hidden by their long dark lashes, rested upon him. Unconsciously she stretched out her unwounded hand and laid it softly upon his bent head.

Even at that supreme moment, when life and death might be hanging in the balance, her touch thrilled through him. The warm blood rushed back to his heart. He took his lips from her arm and looked up at her with a passionate devotion. He felt that if he could die at that moment, death would have for him a sweeter joy than any life could give.

For a moment or two he still held her hand and arm, and she stood trembling, shaking in every limb. To her sight the blue sky was shot with flames, the stream roared in her ears like a mountain torrent; all her being responded to, ached with, the touch of his lips. A divine gratitude, tenderness, flowed from her eyes, her lips were parted with a smile that was not so much a smile as an agony of inarticulate gratitude.

Olive released her arm, bent over the stream, and rinsed his mouth. Then he took her hand and looked at the snake-mark.

"The swelling has gone down," he said, quietly.

She tried to speak, but for a moment her voice would not come. Then she said, tremulously:

"How could you do it?"

He smiled. It seemed to him so natural, so inevitable a thing to do.

"There must be danger!" she said. "You have taken the poison from me; you—you may die!"

"I don't think so," he replied. "At any rate, I'm not afraid. It doesn't matter in the very least whether I live or die; but you—ah, well, that's different."

"Not matter?" she said, her eyes fixed upon him with an expression which they had never yet worn.

"Not in the least," he answered. "Let me look at your arm again."

She put it behind her for an instant, then, under his gaze, she held it out again. He took it and bent over it, and his lips nearly touched it; but he checked himself.

"You must see a doctor at once," he said. "This rough surgery of mine may not be sufficient. Come!"

"And you, too!" she exclaimed, falteringly.

They picked up their rods and went back along the stream. Clive looked straight before him. He was in a dream—a delicious dream. Could it be that he had saved her life? The thought sent his blood whizzing through his veins.

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She, too, looked straight before her; but now and again she glanced at him with a half-troubled expression. All her woman's soul was in a stir and tumult. This man whom she had only regarded hitherto as a friend and pleasant companion had risked his life for her. A new feeling, a new sensation, stirred within her heart. She felt the iron grip of his hand upon her wrist and arm, and, more than all else, she felt the warmth of his lips upon her wrist. He had risked his life for her. And how masterfully, with what indifference to his own safety he had done it! If he had been her own father, her own brother—if she had had one—he could not have done more. She looked at him with a new and subtle appreciation in her gaze. How handsome he was—how strong! She had thought him weak—an invalid; but he had proved her master—had saved her against her wish and will. She walked beside him with bent head.

At that moment the longing to throw his arms round her and strain her to his breast was strong within Clive; but he restrained himself. How could he do so without saying, "I am Lord Clive Marle; my history you can glean from any of the society papers. I am unfit to be your husband, or the husband of any pure, unstained girl?"

They reached the farm. Still pale and wan, they sat down to the bountiful tea which the farmer's wife had provided for them. Like Mrs. Hern, she insisted upon treating them as an engaged couple, and she left them to themselves. Beryl poured out his tea for him; but she could not raise her eyes to his face, though she saw him as plainly as if she looked at him. Clive drank and ate in a kind of dream. He felt the soft, warm arm upon his lips, he felt the touch of her hand upon his head. Passion wove a glamour around him which confused and bewildered him.

It was almost a relief when he went out and ordered the horse to be harnessed. The whole household collected in the front to see them off, and the farmer's wife smiled and nodded at them in a benedictory way. She was firmly convinced that they were engaged, and was delighted that Miss Beryl should have got so handsome and fine a gentleman.

"Miss Beryl, 'er be lookin' rather pale like," she said to Clive as he put Beryl in her seat. "It be the heat, I make no doubt; and Miss Beryl she be that strong and lissom that

she don't take no thought o' gettin' tired; but the drive 'ome 'ull bring the color to 'er cheeks."

Olive looked at Beryl anxiously as they drove off.

"Do you feel ill?" he asked. "Wrong in any way?"

She shook her head.

"No," she said in a low voice. "And you?"

"Why, what should be wrong with me?" he asked in reply.

"The poison could only hurt if it got through the broken skin, I suppose. Rest assured, there's not the least danger to me. Let me see your wrist."

She held it out to him for an instant, then drew it out of sight again.

There was no sign of swelling, but there was a red mark larger and more distinct than before; it was not caused only by the snake's bite.

"Put it in your lap, where I can see it when I want to," he said.

She smiled faintly, hesitated a second, then obeyed, as if she could not help herself.

There was no laughter, no snatches of song now. She sat quite motionless, looking straight before her; and yet she could see his face. His brows were drawn straight, the firmly chiselled lips pressed tightly together. His nearness had meant nothing to her as they had driven out in the morning, but now the touch of his arm seemed charged with a subtle significance; and every time she felt it a thrill ran through her. And yet the silence was no constraint; she felt as if she knew what was passing in his mind; that it was his anxiety on her account which kept him silent, and the thought gave her a strange and novel pleasure.

"It doesn't seem to be swelling," he said, after they had driven some distance.

"No," she answered; "I feel sure that it is all right."

"I wish I could feel as confident," he rejoined.

"Perhaps if I put my arm out of sight you would forget it?" she said.

"No, I shouldn't," he responded. "Please keep it where it is."

She let it remain within sight in her lap.

As they came to the cross-roads they saw a gig ambling towards them. It was driven by a groom in a weather-worn livery, and a little old man sat by his side.

"Who was that?" Clive asked, as they passed them.

"That was the doctor," she replied.

"Oh, why didn't you tell me?" he exclaimed, reproach-

fully; and he turned the chestnut sharply, and overtook the gig.

The groom pulled up, and the doctor raised his hat again.

"Good-morning, Miss Frayne. Want me?"

Beryl shook her head; but Clive said:

"Yes, if you please, doctor. Miss Frayne has been stung by an adder. Will you look at the place?"

The old doctor was out of his trap in a moment and round at her side.

Beryl held out her wrist, and he examined it, at first without any expression on his wrinkled face—in fact, with the doctor's mask on, and then curiously.

"Are you sure it was an adder?" he said. "There's no inflammation."

"It *was* an adder," affirmed Beryl in a very low voice.

"But—but this gentleman, Mr. Marle, drew out the poison."

The doctor looked up at Clive sharply. He did not need to ask how it had been drawn out.

"That was a wise and clever thing to do, sir," he said.

"I'm glad of that," replied Clive. "It was the most natural thing, at any rate."

"Is there any harm to Mr. Marle?" she asked, with a quiver in her voice.

Her face had flushed crimson, but had grown pale again.

"None at all," said the doctor. "But there might have been great danger to you if this gentleman had not acted so promptly. Don't be alarmed."

"I am not alarmed—on my own account," said Beryl, with downcast eyes.

"No mischief will come of it, or the place would be inflamed and angry. Take two or three glasses of wine when you get home, and go to bed early; no playing the violin to-night, mind! Good-bye—good-bye. And good-bye to *you*, sir!"

He held out his hand to Clive and gripped the young man's strong hand in his thin and wrinkled one, and looked into Olive's eyes with that silent admiration which one brave man feels for another.

Olive drew a long breath of relief as he drove along.

"You are not anxious now?" she asked, trying to laugh.

"Not so much," he replied; "but I shall not be quite easy till I see you again to-morrow. I shall see you to-morrow?"

"To-morrow is Sunday; you will see me at church," she said.

They reached the gate opening on the winding path to Hill

Cote, and Olive got down and held out his arms. She did not merely give him her hand, as she had done in the morning, but she let him take her bodily. For a moment, he felt as if he must, at all costs, press her to his heart; but he restrained himself and set her down gently, as if she were a little child. She stood for a moment with downcast eyes, then she raised them slowly to his face.

"Good-bye!" she said, and her voice faltered. "I am trying to thank you. And—and I can't! I would ask my father to; but I don't want to tell him."

"No, don't!" he cried, quickly. "It would only alarm him. There is nothing to thank me for. If you knew—"

He checked himself and set his lips firmly, for he felt that if he uttered another word he must tell her of his great love for her; and he dared not. He held the soft, warm hand a moment, then released it slowly, and with a long look at him she turned and went up the path and out of sight.

He drove the chestnut home at a walk; for was he not going away from her? When he reached the farm he went straight to his room and paced up and down. He knew he must go, and as soon as possible. He could not leave on the morrow, for it was Sunday; besides, he could not tear himself away without saying a definite "good-bye." He must see her once more—for the last time.

Completely restored to health as he was, he slept well that night; but she was with him in his dreams every hour of it, and when he woke in the morning his first thought was of her. The Sabbath peace brooded over the valley. To Olive, in his changed condition of mind and spirit, the place seemed like Paradise. The bells began to ring melodiously, and he walked slowly toward the church.

Religion and Olive, hitherto, had had very little to say to each other; but this morning he felt a longing for the quiet of the church, for the beautiful service, and, alas! above all, for the exquisite music which would come floating down from the organ-loft. He hoped that she would be well enough to play that morning—his last morning!

A few minutes before, the carriage which had stopped beside Olive to enquire its way three nights ago, pulled up in a lane just out of sight of the church, and the woman called Patsy Pryde, after looking out of the window cautiously, alighted. Her small and dainty figure was very quietly dressed, and she wore a veil of grey gossamer which effectually concealed her face. She waited until the bell had ceased and the last strollers had entered the church, then she went

quickly up the path, entered noiselessly, and slipped into the last seat.

From thence she had a view of the whole of the interior, except, of course, the organ-loft above her. She saw Clive sitting in one of the front pews, and she flushed as she shrank back a little, though he could not see her unless he turned completely and looked back.

She looked round the church curiously and keenly, especially at the women; then she frowned slightly and bit her lips softly, as if she were puzzled.

The congregation was the typical one of a country hamlet or village. There were the farmers and some of their wives; one or two visitors from Lynmouth, who had walked over; the vicar's daughter; the doctor's wife. But to her amazement, Patsy Pryde could not find one pretty face. Her look of perplexity increased as she gazed at the women, and then at Lord Clive. What on earth was he doing in church, of all places in the world, and why did he look so altered? She had never seen that expression of gravity, of earnestness, of something that was almost melancholy, on his handsome face before.

Presently the "Venite" commenced. She had been too late for the voluntary, and now, as the music rolled out and an exquisite voice led the singing, Miss Patsy Pryde gave a perceptible start, for she was an artist herself, and she knew when she heard good music and a fine voice.

"My! that's the voice of a leading lady!" she murmured to herself. "And she *can* sing, too! Who on earth can it be? A swell pro. stoppin' at Lynmouth, I expect, and come over for the service. Lor', how she must startle them! Or p'r'aps they don't appreciate it; they look like a lot of sheep," she added to herself, as she looked round contemptuously.

The service went on its peaceful way. Miss Patsy Pryde listened with professional appreciation to the admirable playing and the sweet, sympathetic voice. She enjoyed these, but I am afraid that she thought the vicar's long and rather prosy sermon a decided bore.

When the congregation rose to leave, she slipped out and took up her position round a corner of the church, just behind the porch. The thin stream of people meandered down the path and dispersed, and presently out came Clive. He walked as far as the gate, but there waited. A few minutes afterward Beryl left the church with her father on her arm.

At sight of the beautiful girl, at the flush which rose to the sweet face as Clive came up the path to meet them, Miss

Patsy Pryde crimsoned from neck to temple. Her blue eyes gleamed, the Cupid lips curved into quite an ugly sneer, and the small, beringed hands clenched at her side.

"So that's her, is it?" she said to herself.

She remained, watching them, with a gleam in her eyes and the sneer on her lips, until they had disappeared. As she turned to go to her carriage, Saunders, the sexton, shuffled out. She hesitated a moment, then she went up to him.

"Can you tell me the name of that young lady who's just gone out with her father and the young gentleman?" she asked, carelessly.

Saunders shaded his eyes and looked after Beryl.

"Sartinly I can," he said. "That be Miss Frayne of Hill Cote."

Miss Patsy Pryde repeated the name as if she meant to remember it.

"She plays the organ?" she enquired, sharply.

"She do," assented Saunders, grumpily. He wanted to get home to his dinner.

"What was the name of the gentleman, do you know?" she asked.

"Which 'un—the young 'un?" said Saunders, still more grumpily. "He's Mr. Marle, as is stayin' at Holly Farm. I don't know no more about 'im, so it's no use askin' me, mum," he said, testily.

But Miss Patsy Pryde had got all she wanted, and she went quickly to her carriage.

"So that's the game, is it?" she muttered, as she leant back. "'Mr.' Marle! I thought you were up to mischief. Well, I admire your taste, any way. She is good-looking enough, and she sings like Patti. Trust you for finding out the best of 'em! Yes; I see your game, my dear Clive. But I think *I* come in somewhere here."

She laughed softly; but it was not a pleasant laugh, by any means, and it did not harmonise with the fair face and almost child-like blue eyes.

CHAPTER IX.

UNCONSCIOUS of Patsy Pryde's presence, and her amiable intentions, Clive walked home with Beryl and her father. He could not, within hearing of Mr. Frayne, enquire after the wound in her wrist, but he looked at her anxiously, and she met his significant glance with a smile. As he had come up the path towards them, she had greeted him for the first time

with a blush. It was faint and fleeting, and left the clear ivory of her face almost instantly; but it had been there.

For the first time, the lovely eyes seemed to avoid him, after the first glance of his face—a glance as anxious as his had been—and she was very quiet and silent. She had lain awake nearly all the night, thinking of him.

When Love first comes to a maid, he casts before him a shadow of something like fear, especially when the girl's nature is as pure and her mind as innocent as Beryl's. After all, though Love's chains may be of flowers, they are still chains, and a woman knows, innocent though she may be, that, at the approach of Love, her old freedom is departing never to return.

Then, again, as the poet remarks, "Love's feet are softly shod with pain;" there is no rose without its thorn, no joy without its alloy of sorrow and doubt.

Beryl knew, as she looked at the spot which his lips had pressed, that a change had already come over her life. She felt a different girl from the one who had set out in the morning so blithe and gay of heart. What the change was she scarcely knew. She did not try to analyse it; but all night long the thought that Clive had risked his life to save hers brooded over her like a spirit.

Every incident of the scene, every trivial detail, rose before her; she felt again, twenty times, the grip of his strong hand, the touch of his lips. It was the touch of the master; and while there was joy in the remembrance, there was a certain shrinking: for woman dreads a master.

She had tried to forget him during the service, but her eyes wandered towards him, and, though she knew it not, a new and tender light was glowing in their depths. Clive was rather silent as he walked up with them to the house. He refused to stay to the mid-day dinner, but he was at church again in the evening, and he went home with them, and remained to supper.

She seemed more beautiful to him that evening than ever. The charm of her presence stole over him like a subtle perfume; and the very change in her manner, her subdued voice and evading eyes, only added to the spell. She played and sang, and he listened like a man entranced. He could watch her unseen and unrestrained, and every line of the graceful figure, the curve of the white neck, the pose of the small head, with its soft, full hair, were photographed on his mind. Once he got up and went to the piano to turn over the music for her, and as she lifted her eyes with mute thanks, the al-

most irresistible temptation to bend over her and whisper, "I love you!" assailed him so fiercely that he was obliged to walk away abruptly.

He tried to tell her that he was going on the morrow; he thought that he would bring it out casually, and with an air of indifference, or with just a proper amount of friendly regret; but, as the time wore on, he found that he could not do so. The words stuck in his throat, and would not leave his lips.

He decided that he would go away without a word, and write a friendly line or two from London. We are told that our good intentions pave the way to Hades; and, if it be true, it is equally true that we are often unwittingly assisted in our fatal road-making. Just as he was getting up to go, Mr. Frayne said:

"Beryl, Saunders tells me that the thatch on the kitchen roof must be seen to at once." Saunders did odd jobs at Hill Cote, and was a kind of master-of-all-trades as well as sexton. "He tells me that there's no reed to be got in Trentishoe, but that we shall have to go to Moorpath for it. I was thinking you might borrow the Jennings' jingle and drive over to-morrow and see about it."

Olive's heart leapt as he listened. Here was an excuse for one more day with her—one long, last day.

"No need to borrow the Jennings' jingle, sir," he said. "I will drive Miss Beryl"—he had got into the habit of calling her Miss Beryl, as all the people round did. "I shall be delighted if she will allow me to do so." He tried to speak in a casual way, and selected a cigarette with great care as he spoke.

Two days ago Beryl would have accepted readily, and with a smile and nod, but now she stood with her eyes downcast and a sudden swift blush on her face.

"You will want to go fishing," she said in a low voice. "I think to-morrow will be a good day; and I can take the Jennings' jingle."

"I should much prefer the drive," he replied. And he got up, as if that settled it. She breathed a sharp little sigh, but raised no further objection; and Mr. Frayne thanked him easily.

For the first time, Beryl did not go out with Clive as far as the terrace, but said good-bye at the window. He lingered a moment.

"You are quite well to-night?" he asked. "You feel no ill effects?"

"Oh, no, no!" she responded. "And you?"

He laughed. "Not in the least," he assured her. "I was never better—never half so well—in my life."

Her eyes rested on him for a moment. "I am very glad," she said, and her voice was slightly tremulous. "I have been very anxious." She turned and left him as she spoke; and the sweetness of her words and her tone remained with him all the way home.

Next day, at the appointed time, he drove round for her. The day was hot, and the sun shone through a kind of haze—the Devon haze. She came down the path with her light water-proof on her arm.

"Father says it is going to rain," she said, as she lifted her eyes to him. "Shall we go?"

His heart sank. He looked at her in silence for a moment. Was he to be robbed of her this last day? She waited, with downcast eyes.

"I don't mind the rain, but perhaps—you—?"

She lifted her eyes with another smile.

"In Devonshire one learns to think nothing of the rain," she declared.

"That's all right. Come on, then!" he said, in a man's fashion, and he went to lift her into the dog-cart; but she seemed to evade him, and, just touching the rail, got up quickly. He noticed the evasion, and he wondered what caused it. Was she just a little offended with him for treating her so roughly the other day? It was just possible. She was so different from any other woman he had met, so pure, so maidenly; he remembered how sternly he had spoken, bidding her be still; how he had almost bullied her; how tightly he must have gripped her arm.

They drove off very quietly, almost silently. He drew the dust-wrap over her knees, and doubled up his water-proof for a footstool for her feet. If her nearness had thrilled him before, it moved him ten times more intensely now. Though he, in very truth, thought so very lightly of it, what he had done for her seemed to have forged a connecting link between them. He felt as if she were in some way belonging to him; a dangerous feeling for a man in his case!

Presently they began to talk; he led her into speaking of her girlhood, and he listened intently and with all his soul to her frank, ingenuous confidences.

"I have always felt as if I were different from other girls," she said; and as she spoke she was conscious of the pleasure and subtle delight of talking to him of herself and her own

life. "Other girls have a mother, and sisters, and brothers, but I have had no one but my father. We have always lived together in the quiet, solitary way you see. Sometimes when I meet other girls—there is a tennis-party at the vicarage, or an afternoon tea at the Welladays', sometimes—I feel strange, and as if I belonged to another world than theirs. I can't find anything to talk to them about; and, though I try, I cannot get up any interest in their conversation. They have all been, or lived, in London, and I know nothing of it. And I don't care about dress."

"Don't you?" he said. "You are always so perfectly dressed!"

She opened her lovely eyes upon him with an amused smile.

"I'm afraid you say that because you don't know," she remarked.

He thought of his vast experience, of his reputation as a critic of woman's apparel, and smiled half bitterly.

"Oh, yes, I do," he said. "I have noticed that you never wear an unbecoming colour—that your things always fit you as if they grew on you."

"Why, how can you say so?" she exclaimed. "I make them nearly all myself!"

"Perhaps that's why," he said. "But go on; you were saying—"

"What was I saying?" she asked. "Oh, that I felt so different from other girls. I know that they regard me curiously, and as if they, too, felt I were different from them. I often wish my mother had lived. Then I should have been like other girls. You have seen her portrait?"

Clive nodded. "Yes," he said. "She must have been very beautiful. You are very like her." The inferential compliment passed over unheeded.

"So my father says," she replied. "He was very fond of her, of course; he cannot speak of her even now without tears. I don't remember her. She must have died when I was very young. But why am I telling you all this?" She laughed softly.

"Because, you know, I like to hear it," he said. "Anything, however trivial, concerning yourself interests me."

She was silent a moment, then she said, and naturally enough:

"Have you any brothers and sisters?"

Clive began to quake. Was she going to ask him about his family?

"No," he answered. "I was an only child."

"We are alike in that respect," she said. Then she looked at him with sudden wonder. "I thought you said that the portrait in your locket was that of your sister?"

Olive managed to keep his countenance, but he mentally cursed himself fluently.

"I meant the only boy," he said. "My sister—she's dead. My father and mother died when I was young, and I was brought up by an uncle." He grew hot, and raged inwardly. "What a lovely view!" he broke off!

She looked round. "Oh, it is too misty to see it perfectly. I am hoping it will clear presently. There is a magnificent view from that tor. It's out of our way, but we might walk to the top after lunch, while the horse is resting."

"We will," he said.

"That's Moorpath in front of us," she observed presently.

They drove into the small village, where their appearance and the swell turn-out caused quite a sensation. The landlord of the small inn came out in a state of suppressed excitement, and half a dozen eager, ready hands took a part in unharnessing the chestnut. Olive ordered lunch, and then he and Beryl went to the farmer who owned the precious reed. They arranged for the necessary quantity, and returned to the inn.

Beryl's shyness, if shyness it could be called, had worn off, and she presided at the simple but bountiful lunch with all her wonted, quiet gaiety.

As he sat opposite her, Olive felt that he had never been so happy in all his life. It was a pleasure to look at the lovely face flushed with health; it was a joy to meet the clear gaze of the violet eyes; it was a delight to listen to the musical voice, the soft, girlish laughter. There was a scarcity of knives: they made a joke of it; the ham was salt, and they discovered a fund of humour in the fact. He watched her, as she cut the bread, with the hungry, thirsty look of a lover. He noticed every movement of the graceful figure, every turn of the supple wrist. Was it months or weeks or years ago his lips had pressed the white wonder of her arm?

"I feel as if I had caused a famine in the land," he said. "No more cream, no more anything. Let us go out."

They left the inn, and wandered aimlessly through the one street.

"Oh, you wanted to go up the tor," she said.

He didn't particularly want to go anywhere, but he was ready to go with her to the remotest ends of the earth. They

left the village, and, as they did so, and began to climb, he looked up at the sky.

"What about water-proofs?" he asked.

"Oh, it can't rain much," she replied, carelessly.

They climbed slowly, and the moorland air blew freshly across their faces. In his new-found strength, Clive felt as if he could cross the Alps. Beryl stepped lightly beside him. He thought of a poem he had read—by one of the minor poets of the day—entitled "The Mountain Nymph." Surely the poet must have seen, and been walking beside, some such embodiment of grace and youth and health as Beryl Frayne!

They reached the top of the hill. Like most persons who climb for a view, they were disappointed. A yellow haze hung over the mountains, and clung to the valleys beneath.

"I'm sorry," said Beryl. "It's almost like a mist."

"I should like to see one of these mists of yours," he declared. "I can scarcely believe they are as terrible as you say."

She laughed. "Wait till you are lost in one!" she said. "By the way, this is rather a nasty place for a mist. There is a big bog at the bottom of this hill—it is called Fellen Bog. They say—I hope it is not true—that there are several persons, bodies, buried in its depths."

They sat down on the top of the hill. Beryl clasped her knees in her hand.

"Oh, how thirsty I am!" she said, half unconsciously.

"It's that confounded ham," returned Clive. "I noticed a little rill just below here. I've got a collapsible glass in my pocket; I'll go down and fetch you a drink."

"Oh, no, no," she said. "Don't trouble."

"It's no trouble," he answered; and he sprang up and began to descend the hill.

Beryl looked at after him with a dreamy light in her eyes. At that moment the thought flashed across her: What should she do when he was gone? And he might go any day! What a blank her life would seem! Her life! He seemed to have entered into it, become part of it—become necessary to it. Was there any one like him? So gentle, so tender, and yet so manly! He had brought into her life a flash of sunlight, a warmth of the very sun itself. And he would go presently, and she would see him no more. A pang of pain shot through her whole being; her head drooped; her hands, clasped round her knee, clenched together tightly. She looked before her with a vacant, dreamy gaze.

Suddenly, the wind fluttered, like the wings of a bird, a

fine rain fell drizzlingly, and, in another instant, the extraordinary mist swooped down upon her, and blotted out not only the dim view, but the objects near to her hand.

A famous Devon mist *had* come. She sat for a moment easily enough; then, as the mist increased in density, she realised its significance. She herself was quite safe. She had only to sit still and wait until the mist had passed. But Olive! He had gone down the hillside; he would try to make his way back to her, and he would not be able to find his way. Near to them, just below them, was the fatal bog; he might, in his ignorance of the locality, wander into it. If he did—!

She sprang to her feet, a lively terror thrilling and throbbing through every vein.

She called to him; and, in that moment, she remembered only his Christian name.

"Olive! Olive!" rose from her lips, and echoed dully across the mist-clad hills.

Her voice, clear as it was, could not penetrate the thick vapour. She could not see her hand before her; and she knew that he, too, must be as densely enveloped, and as helpless.

She tried to pierce the mist. It was impenetrable. She pictured him wandering aimlessly to and fro; she saw him walking blindly to the horrible death which awaited him so near at hand. And, in that moment, the love for him which lay dormant in her heart rose in all its conquering strength and might.

She knew that she loved him. She felt that she would willingly lay down her life for him. She knew that he was more precious to her than life itself. And she was here, and he was—where? Wandering, probably, to his death! She stretched her arms above her head and called on God to help and save him.

What should she do? To remain there inactive was impossible. With her heart beating like a sledge-hammer, she descended the hill slowly. At every twenty steps she called to him. And it was always "Olive."

She forgot herself entirely. All her heart and soul was bound up in him, and the desire for his safety. He had saved her life; *his* life was in danger. And she alone could save it.

Blindly, uncertainly, stumbling often, with her hands outstretched, she made her way down in what she hoped was the direction he had taken. As before, she called to him; but no response came. The terrible mist swallowed up her voice, as if in mockery.

Suddenly, her foot caught in something soft; she lost her

balance, and fell prone. Her hands, as she threw them out, grasped something soft and warm. She knew it was Clive, and her heart leapt and overflowed with the feeling of joy and thanksgiving to God.

She moved her hands until they touched his face. He made no response to her touch, and, at his inertness, a terrible dread stole over her.

She knelt beside him, and looked through the mist at his face. His eyes were closed, a thin stream of blood—she could feel its warmth trickling over her hand—ran from his brow.

She lifted his head to her knee, and bent over him.

"Clive! Clive!" she murmured, unconsciously. "Oh, dearest, dearest!"

As if her voice, and such words, had power to call him back from the land of dreams, or death itself, Clive opened his eyes.

"Patsy, Patsy!" he murmured, "is that you? Where are we?"

CHAPTER X.

His eyes closed again; his head fell back upon her arm. His voice had been so low that it was scarcely audible; but she caught the name. At that moment, however—in the stress and strain of her emotion and anxiety—she scarcely noticed his words. It was not until long afterwards that she remembered them.

She looked down at him anxiously, pityingly. She knew very well what had happened; he had slipped, or his foot had caught in the heather, and he had fallen and struck his head against one of the granite rocks which showed their sharp heads through the heather and the furze.

She did not know what to do. If she left him in search of water or help, she might not be able to find him again; but, indeed, she could not have left him. She wiped the blood from his forehead, and tried to staunch the wound—it was not a large one—with her bare palm; and even in the midst of her agitation it was a labour of love. A sense of wonder at her own feelings stole over her. She knew that she loved this man whose head was lying on her arm and pressed against her bosom. The knowledge had come to her suddenly, like a flash of lightning, the very moment she had thought of his peril. She knew that he was all the world to her; that all her future was bound up in him; that the happiness of her life depended upon him. Only a few days ago, and she had

not been aware of his existence, had not known that there was such a person in the world as Olive Marle; why, until yesterday—or was it the day before?—he had only been to her a pleasant companion; one whom it was good to look at or to be with; one whom she should be sorry to part from; but love! No thought of it had ever entered her head. Now he was all the world to her.

A warm flush stole slowly over her face. Not only her face; her whole body seemed burning with the blush. She loved him, but he—? He probably still thought of her as she had thought of him—just as a pleasant friend—no more. He must never know that she loved him; she must hide it from him, hide it from every one; she must try and forget it. At the thought, she winced as from a sudden pain. She knew that she should never forget him; that the love with which her heart was aching, the love that was throbbing in every pulse, would not be killed, would always remain with her as long as she lived.

These thoughts and phases of feeling which had taken so long to set down flashed through her mind in a few seconds; though minutes, hours, seemed to pass as she waited for signs of returning consciousness. She could do nothing but wait. Sometimes Olive carried a small flask of spirits. She knew that he carried it in the breast-pocket of his jacket, and shyly she felt for it; but it was not there. She realised her utter inability to help him, with an almost fierce resentment. He had helped *her* when she was in danger; now that he might be in peril she could do nothing for him—it was just like a woman!

She gently and softly smoothed the hair from the wound, and, half unconsciously, murmured his name, pityingly, entreatingly, as if imploring him to come back to life. Presently, as if in response to her mute prayer, Olive opened his eyes again and moved, and, peering down at him eagerly, she saw the light of intelligence slowly dawning in them.

“Beryl!” he said.

Her heart leapt, and the blood rushed to her face. Beryl!

“Yes, yes!” she whispered.

“You are there? Thank God!” he said, a little feebly still. “I thought you might be lost—that something might have happened to you!”

“No, no!” she cried, almost impatiently; “I am all right; but you—!”

He raised his head, and put his hand to the cut.

“What’s the matter? what has happened?” he enquired.

“Ah, yes, I remember. I slipped, and came down rather

heavily; I must have knocked my head against a stone, or something."

"Yes; you must have hurt yourself—you fainted!"

"Great aunt, you don't say so!" he said, as if ashamed; and he struggled to his feet as he realised that his head was resting upon her arm. "I'm awfully sorry! It was clumsy of me. I'm afraid I've frightened you."

"Yes, a little," she admitted, trying to smile. "But never mind me. Are you very much hurt? Do you feel dizzy?"

"I'm quite sure I'm not hurt in the very least," he said, "though I feel slightly giddy and owlish; but it will go off in a minute. I was hurrying along, trying to get back to you. I was afraid I should lose you. How thick the mist is still! How on earth did you manage to find me? I didn't call out?"

"No," she replied, "or, if you did, I didn't hear you. I don't know how I found you; I just walked on blindly, and trusting to chance. But, oh, I'm so glad—!"

"You ought not to have moved," he said. "It was very dangerous; you ought to have waited there."

A lump rose in her throat; she could scarcely control her words. "I had to try and find you," she answered. "There is a bog not far from here, just below us, I think!"

"And you might have wandered into it!" he said, almost sternly.

She looked at him through the mist, with a kind of wonder. He gave no thought to his own peril.

"It is as thick as a blanket," he observed, after a moment had passed. "I suppose we can only wait?"

"Only wait," she assented.

"How cold the mist is!" he remarked. "Do you feel it?" He took her hand. It was not cold, but soft and warm as usual, but, to his surprise, it was trembling. "I have frightened you after all!" he said. "What a confounded nuisance I have made of myself! I wish you hadn't found me, but had waited where you were until the mist had cleared, and then you wouldn't have known anything had happened."

She did not speak; at the moment she could not.

"You'll catch your death of cold," he continued. He slipped off his jacket and proceeded to put it round her shoulders.

"No, no!" she exclaimed, brokenly; and she put out her hands to prevent him.

"But I insist!" he said. "I have a flannel shirt on, and

the mist won't hurt me, while you've nothing but that thin blouse."

She still struggled, but feebly, for she had suddenly grown weak and irresolute. He was tying the sleeves across her bosom, when something hot fell on his hand. For a moment he did not know what it was; then another fell, and he realised that they were tears. Something shot through him; his own hands trembled; he held the sleeves of the jacket tightly, and looked through the mist at her face, and something in it made his heart throb wildly.

"You are crying!" he said in a low voice. "You're upset. There's no need—" Then he stopped; for she raised her eyes to his for an instant, and the unconscious glance smote upon him like a revelation.

"Beryl!" he whispered. "Beryl!"

There was silence for a moment. A curlew flew heavily above their heads, and shrilled dully through the mist. They seemed alone in the world, seemed to be standing heart to heart, with the Great Secret veiled from them only by the mist.

His hands moved from the sleeve, cold and insentient, to her soft, trembling hands, and he held them tightly.

"Beryl, I love you!" he said. "I love you! Stay, I know I ought not to tell you so now, but I can't help it! I love you with all my heart and soul. You have not guessed it, but I have loved you for some time past. Since the first day we met you have always been in my mind. I have thought of nothing else but you. This has been the happiest time of my life, because I have been with you. I am only happy when I am with you. I love you! Can you try and love me a little in return, Beryl?"

She stood perfectly motionless, with downcast eyes and tightly-set lips. In a woman's life there is one supreme moment which makes that life worth living, which transforms this commonplace world of ours into an earthly Paradise, which atones for all the barrenness of her past, and suffuses her future with a light which never was on land or sea. And this moment, for which women have gladly bartered their lives and even their souls, had come to Beryl.

She did not want to speak, to utter a sound which would break in upon the echo of his words—words which have been uttered so often, but which, to her ear, thrilled with a music sweeter and more divine than any instrument or human voice could evoke. She wanted him to speak again; she listened in suspense, her whole soul waiting, thirsting for his voice.

"Beryl!" he began again. "Are you angry with me?" For she had, though weakly, tried to take her hands away from his; but they held her still more tightly. "I know I ought not to have spoken now; that I ought to have waited until you knew me better."

His voice faltered at the last words. Knew him better! He felt the mockery of the words. If she knew him to be Lord Clive Marle, knew the life he had led, what chance would there be for him? What else could he hope for from those sweet lips but "No!"

"I know I am not worthy of you," he went on. "Every man says that, and must say it, to a girl like you, Beryl. I'm not worthy to touch you, to kiss the hem of your dress. But I love you more, perhaps, than a better man could do. If you will try to love me I will try to be more worthy of you; I will try to make you happy. I will live for you and you only. No woman in all the world shall be loved more devotedly."

She was silent. Every word sank into her heart, and became enshrined therein instantly, like a precious gem, to be gloated over in the future. The mist seemed full of the music of his voice; the touch of his hands was as a direct appeal to her heart.

"Won't you speak to me, Beryl?" he pleaded. "Won't you tell me if there's any hope for me? If—if—there is none—if you feel that you can't care for me, tell me the truth, and I'll bear it; I'll have to. But if you think you can care for me even a little, ah, Beryl, tell me so. I will get you to love me in time. I will be patient. I'll wait until I've won your whole heart. Come, Beryl, speak to me!"

She raised her eyes to his, then looked from side to side, as if seeking guidance—help. Her soul was in a tumult; she could not choose her words, could not frame the avowal which trembled in her heart and on her lips.

He waited. It seemed as if she would not speak; the chill of dread fell on him, cold as the mist around them. Then, suddenly, her lips parted, and she murmured:

"I love you."

He drew her towards him, and, pressing her to his heart, kissed the tremulous lips passionately, but so gently that he did not frighten her.

"Dearest! Dearest! it seems almost too good to be true!" He looked round, as if he half feared that he was still conscious and dreaming. "Say it again, Beryl, or I shall not be able to believe it."

Her lips moved against his breast, and she whispered, almost inaudibly:

"It is true; I love you."

When a man is in love it always seems to him well-nigh impossible that the woman he loves should stoop to love him in return. Why should she? Why should she, like a goddess, descend from the empyrean and bestow the glory of her divine being upon such a mortal as himself? That this lovely girl, this type of all that was sweetest and purest in womanhood, should care for him—Clive Marle—filled him with amazement and awe. That she should suffer him to kiss her set him trembling with wonder.

"Are you sure?" he faltered.

She raised her eyes with a frank smile in them. How sure she was! Nothing in all the world was so fixed and certain as the love which filled her heart and dominated her whole being.

"When?" he asked, looking down at her face nestling on his shoulder. "It seems so wonderful!"

"I don't know," she said, slowly, and with a little pause between the words which accentuated the love music in her voice. "I don't know; I am all confused. I think I knew that—that I loved you when I missed you just now. And yet it must have been before. I think it was the other day, when the adder bit me—when you—I can't tell! I wish I knew. I should like to remember the moment always—to think of it."

Though her voice faltered, she spoke frankly and unashamedly. This strange, new feeling, this love of hers, was nothing to be ashamed of. She had given herself to him unreservedly; had placed her heart in his hands with a woman's full surrender.

"Why should it seem so strange that I should love you?" she asked.

He laughed softly, with a touch of bitterness and self-reproach as he thought of his unworthiness.

"The best man that ever lived is scarcely worthy the love of any woman," he said; "and I'm far from the best. What you can see in me—!"

The faint smile dawned in her eyes again.

"It is I who should say that," she responded. "Why should you love me, when you have seen, known, so many other girls? You have lived in the world all your life, have travelled, must have seen so many beautiful women, so many

clever and brilliant—I seem to see them all: a long procession. And you have passed them all by and chosen me!”

Her sweet humility smote him with pain.

“Dearest!” he said, earnestly, almost solemnly, “I have never seen any girl like you; never one half so beautiful, never one so sweet. Fate sent me down here that I might find you. You compare yourself with other girls! There is no one like you—no one!”

She smiled again.

“That’s because you—love me,” she whispered, with her eyes hidden.

“No!” he said. “There is not a man who will not envy me my beautiful wife, with her angel’s face, and her voice—”

At the word “wife,” he felt her tremble in his arms, and he realised suddenly the difficulties of the path which lay before him.

He must take her home; go straight to her father, and ask for her. He must tell Sebastian Frayne that he, Clive, was Lord Clive Marle, and heir to the Marquis of Doyne. He must make confession of his past history. And, if he did not, Sebastian Frayne would naturally make inquiries, and discover it for himself. The father would feel it his duty to tell the daughter. What would happen? He felt cold as he pictured the results. The ordinary man of the world would probably consent to overlook that past, be content with Clive’s promise of amendment, and give him his daughter. There were hundreds of fathers, and mothers, too, who would willingly, eagerly, have accepted him as their son-in-law without any such promise; but Sebastian Frayne was not a man of the world, and Beryl was very different from the fortune and title-hunting girls in society.

What should he do? His fate seemed to tremble in the balance: happiness on one side, unspeakable misery on the other. Instinctively, he pressed her more closely to him, and kissed her with a passion rendered all the more intense by the sudden dread which gripped him.

She was startled by the expression of his face.

“We must go!” she said. “The mist is clearing; we can make our way now.”

“Must we?” he asked. “It seems hard to leave this place where I have found the greatest happiness of my life.”

“Yes, it is getting late,” she said. She put up her hand and touched the cut on his forehead softly, caressingly; then, slowly, with a blush creeping from her neck upwards, she put

her arms round his neck, and drew his head down until his lips met hers.

* * * * *

As they drove homeward, her hand clasped in his, her eyes turned now and again, with the love-light in them, towards his, which met hers with a passionate devotion, the dread that had assailed him on the hillside grew still more threatening.

"Beryl," he said, suddenly, "I ought to go to your father to-night and ask him to give you to me."

She started, and looked up at him. She had not thought of that; and now she shrank from the idea of the announcement, the making public, as it were, of their love.

"Must you?" asked she, with a little tender reluctance. "Must you, to-night? What will my father say, I wonder?"

"If he says what he ought, he will tell me to clear off the premises," answered Clive, trying to speak lightly.

She laughed softly, incredulously.

"I am sorry!" she said. "It has not been our secret long."

He flushed at the word "secret."

"I wonder whether you would mind if I asked you to let it remain our secret for a time?" His voice faltered, and his brows drew together.

"Why, no; if you wish it," she said, innocently and unsuspectingly. "But why?"

He was silent for a moment. He could tell her something of the truth, at any rate.

"I haven't told you much about myself and my relations, dearest," he replied. "I will some day." He looked straight before him, and flicked the horse unnecessarily; he could feel her eyes resting upon him. "I depend mainly upon an uncle. He is well off, and makes me an allowance."

"And he might object to your marrying me?" she put in.

"No, no," he said, quickly. "But I should like to tell him; I would rather that he heard of our engagement from myself."

"And you would like to tell him before you tell my father?" asked Beryl.

"That's just it, dearest," he responded. "You seem to know my very thoughts."

"Do I?" she said. "Perhaps I do. How wonderful that is!"

"Let us keep our secret for a little while. I will go up to town and see my uncle."

"And then you will come back and tell my father whether you can marry me or not?"

She smiled up at him, for she knew, within her heart, that he would not permit any one, anything, to separate them; and Olive smiled back, with the confident assertion and assurance of intense and perfect love.

"Put it that way, if you like, dearest," he said; "though I would marry you, if you will have me, though everything on earth stood in the way!"

How sweet to her was the audacity of the assertion!

"We'll keep our secret, dearest, for a little while?" he asked.

And she looked up at him, with infinite trust in her eyes, and, with infinite trust, answered simply:

"Yes."

To every one of us there is allotted, so we are told, a guardian angel. Where was Beryl Frayne's at that moment?

CHAPTER XI.

It was a Ladies' Night at the Outcasts' Club, and the well-known room, with its sage plush hangings and its quaint but comfortable furniture, was filled with a crowd which was in some measure brilliant and altogether interesting.

The Outcasts' was originally a small club, like many other artistic ones, started by a small band of impecunious actors, authors, and painters. Like Thackeray's famous club, it had started in the back room of a public-house off the Strand, and at that time its members were satisfied with beer in the pewter, and gin and water with a slice of lemon, with long pipes in which they smoked tobacco strong enough to move a load of furniture; but, like the Savage and similar institutions, it had developed into a luxurious affair, in which the pewter and the long pipe were conspicuous by their absence; and if any member asked for gin, it was in a small glass, and mixed with his favourite bitters.

To its honour it can be said, that it still welcomed the struggling artist, the actor who was "resting," and the author who dated from Grub Street, and who was painfully familiar with the form "Returned with Thanks;" but some of its members grew famous, and other men, already famous, joined it; the rich man who seeks relaxation in the society of brighter minds, and the titled people, who are too often bored to death at their own clubs, became anxious to be considered, of course, in an artistic sense only, Outcasts.

"Stunning place, the Outcasts'," remarked Lord Walter Sartoria. "Not much class about it, don't-cha-know; and some of the Johnnies are a trifle too free and friendly; and some of them always want to borrow half a crown; but that doesn't touch me, because I've never got half a crown, don't-cha-know; but it's a jolly, amusing place, and there's always some fellows there who'll make you laugh. Then, you can always get something to eat when the other places are shut up, which is an advantage, ain't it? And it's the only shop I know of where a man doesn't get bored to death. I took one of the chaps to my club, the Olympian, and after about an hour of it he begged me, with tears in his eyes, to take him out; said he felt as if he'd been dead and buried for about a month; and upon my word, he wasn't far wrong."

The City man liked it because there was always laughter at the Outcasts'; and there is no laughter in the City, excepting, of course, at the Stock Exchange, where, I believe, the members fill in their spare time with practical jokes of the most appalling character.

On the first Wednesday of every month the Outcasts generously throw open their club, reserving only the small smoking-room, to the fair sex; that is to say, each member has the privilege of bringing two lady friends; and an invitation to the Outcasts' is eagerly sought for and gratefully accepted, not only by female actors, authors, and painters, but by those ladies of society—and they are many—who take an interest in the artistic world.

There is a touch and a tone of that bohemianism which is supposed to be extinct still lingering about the Outcasts'; and its members and its friends actually have the air and manner of being interested in something or other. This is, of course, very bad form, but it has its relish for the jaded mind, which is the chief characteristic of modern society.

The Outcasts' gave their fair guests light refreshments in the shape of sandwiches, cake, bread and butter, unlimited tea and coffee, and glasses of a concoction which was invented by an Outcast, and was called the poison cup. It was very nice, but its composition was preserved as a most solemn secret by the club. You could take two glasses of it with comparative impunity; but the third glass produced the morning headache, and a fourth was considered by all who made its acquaintance to be absolutely fatal. One man was supposed to have indulged in the fifth glass, and he was never seen again after the night of drinking it.

In addition to these light refreshments for the body, the

Outcasts provided, on their Ladies' Nights, an entertainment of the most enjoyable kind. There was an Erard grand in the big room, and one of the several famous pianists who were members of the club would open the programme in a most brilliant manner; a tenor, whose notes were indeed golden, would sing the latest ballad; several great actors would recite; other members would oblige with solos on the violin and less classical instruments; in short, an admirably varied programme would be got through.

And with what *verve* they sang and played and recited! What a magnificent audience to play to, critical and yet sympathetic, and so easily roused to enthusiasm. It may safely be said that the members never performed in the concert room or the theater half as well as they did on the Ladies' Nights at the Outcasts'.

Sometimes the ladies themselves would do something. Many of them were actors or musicians, and, with the good nature of their sex, were always ready to contribute to the entertainment; and then how the walls rocked and the ceiling heaved with the storm of cheers, the clapping of hands, and the peculiar Outcast yell with which the club was wont to express its approval!

On this night the club was very full, the programme was a particularly good one, and royalty itself was amongst the guests. The crowd which packed the room was from every point of view an interesting one, and very different in its elements from that which one sees in a fashionable drawing-room. Evening-dress was the rule, or, rather, it should be said that many members wore it; but several men were in tweed suits; and the velvet jacket, sometimes smeared by the palette and the brush, was dotted here and there, their wearers having probably come straight from the painting lofts of some of the theatres. The splashes of colour in the throng were contributed by the ladies, who were, of course, in evening attire; and their silks and satins, their soft lace and the flash of their diamonds, gave brilliancy to the scene.

Strange to say, the lady of fashion appeared to enjoy the entertainment as much, and to suffer as little from the noise, as her sister from the artistic world. Lady Clara Vere de Vere might not laugh quite as loudly as Miss Polly Bigwood, of the Frivolity, who sat next her, but she enjoyed the comic song and the recitation, and made herself remarkably pleasant to the struggling author who sat on her other side. The most famous comedian of the day had just finished his best recitation, and the shout of applause was at its height, when

the Marquis of Doyne entered the room. He stood just inside the door-way and looked round with his well-known smile, exchanging nods and bows with nearly all who glanced his way; for the marquis was as well known at the Outcasts' as at White's or the Carlton. He was probably not only the best-known but the best-dressed man in the room; his clothes were absolutely faultless, and royalty itself, in the front chair, had condescended to copy the cut of his lordship's white waistcoat. Notwithstanding his white hair, and the net-work of fine wrinkles at the corners of his brilliant eyes, he looked absurdly young as he leant against the wall; his slight, tall figure was as straight as any young man's in the room, and his smile was as bright and light-hearted as a boy's, save for the touch of cynicism in it.

He stood for a little time talking to the men around him, then he moved forward, and a way was made for him so that he might reach the prince and pay his respects to his royal highness. The marquis was a *persona grata* at Court, and the prince and he chatted with a charming friendliness on one side, and an exquisite mixture of self-possession and respect on the other. His lordship was a master of manners, and was equally at home with peer and peasant, royalty or rowdyism.

While they were talking, the prince, looking upwards with evident interest, the marquis bending slightly forward with his pleasant smile, there was a stir at the end of the room near the door, several voices exclaimed, "Here she is!" and many of the audience, as they looked round, began to clap, as if greeting a new arrival.

"Who is it, Doyne?" asked the prince.

The marquis put up his *pince-nez*. In the door-way stood a girl with fair hair and bright blue eyes. She was in evening-dress—a marvel of a dress. It was of soft amber silk, and, hearing it described, one would have said that it was the last colour in the world to suit so fair a complexion; but in reality it only accentuated the milk-white skin, the light gold hair, the turquoise eyes of its wearer. The bodice was glistening with diamonds, diamonds nestling in the soft clouds of chiffon; there was a diamond spray cushioned on the yellow hair, and a string of glittering gems round the white neck. She was on the arm of a dark, short, and thick-set man, with a face like a mask, so set and immovable it seemed, a mask in which the eyes alone, as they glanced from side to side with a quick, swift, and comprehensive glance, appeared to be alive.

"It is Patsy Pryde, sir," replied the marquis.

The prince smiled.

"She has been away, has she not?" he asked.

"Yes; the doctors imperatively ordered her a rest. I am told that Sir William had her kidnapped as she left the theatre one night, chloroformed her, and did not restore her to consciousness until she was in the train and some distance from London."

The prince laughed and glanced at his programme.

"I hope she is going to do something to-night," he said. "Ah, yes; I see she is down for a song and a dance," and he settled himself back in his chair.

The marquis moved away and took a seat at the back. A small crowd had quickly collected round Patsy Pryde, and many of those who had only seen her on the stage or heard of her glanced round at her with interest and curiosity, for Patsy Pryde was one of the great London stars. She was the most famous burlesque actress of the day, and three years ago had emerged from the lines of the ladies of the chorus and taken the town by storm.

Her voice was neither remarkably good nor powerful, but it had an extraordinary quality which, though quite indescribable, was perfectly irresistible. She was by no means a great actress, but she possessed a sense of humour which enabled her to endue even a small part with vitality. There were many women on the stage who could dance her down, but there was not one of them who could so quickly rouse an audience to enthusiasm and drive it half frantic with delight.

Her appearance on the stage was always greeted with roars of welcome, and it seemed as if the public could never have too much of her. Any piece, however poor, in which she appeared was perfectly sure of success. The managers fought for her, and she drew a salary so fabulously large that no one who had not seen the agreement would consent to believe in the amount.

Her fame did not rest upon her histrionic abilities alone, for she had created a sensation in the world outside the theatre. Her extravagance, her audacity, the splendour of her attire, her collection of diamonds, the number and costliness of her horses and carriages, were the favourite topics of the club smoking-rooms and the subject matter for endless paragraphs in the society and theatrical journals. It was said openly that the diamond necklace had been acquired at the cost of the ruin of a well-known peer; it was whispered that one of the leading lights of the City had been very nearly extinguished in the endeavour to satisfy her in the matter of dress and horses.

In her soft amber dress, with her yellow hair and large blue eyes, she looked as simple and innocent and "good" as a child; but no woman in London was keener, more insatiable, more cold-blooded and unscrupulous in the pursuit of her ends, than this fragile-looking girl with the little, sweet, half-wondering smile and the child-like eyes.

Presently it came to her turn on the programme, and the dark, thick-set man, who had stood beside her silent and impassive as a slave, or a soldier on guard, led her up the room to the platform. The prince started the clapping which greeted her, and she dropped him the proper curtsey as she passed his chair. The famous pianist began the accompaniment of her song. It was the one with which all London was ringing, and which had been encored three times nightly—three times!—they would have encored it ninety times if she would have consented, or been able, to respond. It was this song and the dance that followed it which had brought about the collapse, and necessitated Patsy Pryde's temporary withdrawal from the scene of her triumphs. It was an extraordinary song—a mixture of sentiment and burlesque. Part of it she sang with the sweetness of a girl in love, with a modesty and shyness which were absolutely charming; then, suddenly, there came a swift change, an audacious line or two, sang with a strong Cockney accent, and the audience, which a moment before had been silent under the spell of grace and sentiment, were roaring with laughter. The dance was as *bizarre* a mixture. It commenced with a slow, graceful, and sinuous movement. The slight, lithe figure moved languidly and swayed in delightful curves, the long train swept this way and that in soft and delicate lines, but always under the perfect command of the wearer; then, suddenly, just as the senses were soothed and lulled by the soft, slow rhythm of the dance, its mood changed; the train was caught up, the dancer, with an indescribable gesture and grimace, bounded into the air, alighted on her toes, and proceeded to dance with the candour and *abandon* of a street Arab.

An attempt has been made here to describe the song and dance; but it must be frankly admitted that any such attempt must fail. The whole thing was indescribable, but its effect upon the audience was extraordinary. Men, and women, too, found themselves leaning forwards, breathing hard and moving their feet, and sometimes their heads and hands, to the rhythm of the music. While the wonderful performance lasted, one was hypnotised, so to speak; Patsy Pryde held you in the hollow of her hand under an irresistible spell. A roar of

applause, louder than any that had arisen that night, rose as, with a sudden movement, she sank, a soft mass of silk and chiffon, a glitter of yellow hair and scintillating gems, to the stage; and loud cries of "encore" were heard.

She hesitated for a moment, and seemed about to repeat the performance, but the dark-faced man who had stood at the corner of the platform with impassive countenance, raised his eyes and looked at her; then she seemed to change her mind, and with a low, sweeping curtsy declined the encore and with a smile tripped lightly down the steps.

The dark man instantly wound a fleecy cloud round her, and half a dozen men sprang from their seats and offered them to her. With a faint sigh she sank into one close to the marquis, and leaned back with her white arms folded across the cloud on her bosom, and her blue eyes looking round with a pensive little smile, like that which one sees on the face of a tired child.

The marquis bent down.

"I hope you're not tired, my dear?" he asked in a voice which was so like Clive's.

She gave a slight start, and looked up with an air of pleasant surprise, so admirably done that it would have deceived any one, excepting, perhaps, the Marquis of Doyne; he had seen her glance quickly at him from the tail of her eye as she entered the room.

"Oh, how do you do, marquis?" she said. "I didn't know you were here. I'm just a little wee bit tired. You see, this is the first time I've danced since I came back, and one gets a little stiff when one's out of practice."

"Stiff! My dear child, you were the embodiment of grace and suppleness; you surpassed yourself to-night. I've never heard you sing nor seen you dance better. The rest and change have evidently done you good, and the brightest gem of the British stage, the fairest flower in the garden of burlesque, will shine and bloom with more than its former brilliance and beauty."

She showed her short, even teeth with a smile of gratified vanity.

"Nobody says such nice things as you, marquis," she said. "But I ought to be all the better for the change. I can't tell you what I've gone through. However people can live in the country all their lives amazes me; I know my life wouldn't be a very long one if I had to bury myself in some of the places I've been to. Oh, they're beautiful enough and all that, I daresay; but give me Kensington Gardens or Hyde Park

when the Row is full and you can't see the flowers for the mob of people on the path."

"Ah, yes," murmured the marquis, with a bland smile, which concealed the satire of the comment.

"And as to the air everybody raves about, it's my belief that there's no air like the London one."

"Here, for instance," murmured the marquis, glancing round the room.

She laughed.

"Pretty crowded, ain't it?" she said. "All sorts of swells here."

"And a gathering of all the talents," he added. "By-the-way, Patsy, who is your friend?" He glanced at the dark man who was standing just out of hearing, his arms folded across his chest, his face as impassive as a Napoleon's.

Patsy Pryde lowered her voice—the first mandolin player of the day had just commenced his solo.

"That's Mr. Paretta," she answered.

"Not to know Mr. Paretta argues one's self unknown, I confess," said the marquis. "Who is he, Patsy?"

"He is a Spaniard—or is it a Portuguese? Now I come to think of it, I'm not sure he doesn't come from Peru."

"He looks as if he might have come from all three," remarked the marquis.

"All I know is, he's a very nice man," said Patsy.

"Of course," lilted the marquis, sweetly, "or he wouldn't be a friend of yours."

"And that he's enormously rich. He owns a gold mine or a diamond mine, or something of the sort."

"Do I see some of its products to-night?" he asked, softly, as he looked at the diamonds with which she was loaded.

She held up her arm and displayed a magnificent bracelet worthy of a duchess.

"He gave me this," she said. "They're fine stones, aren't they?"

"Fitting gems for so white an arm," he murmured.

She laughed.

"That's what Mr. Paretta said when he put it on," she retorted. "All you men say the same things."

"Which proves their truth," he rejoined. "And where did you pick up—meet Mr. Paretta?"

"Oh, I met him in Paris when I was performin' there last season. He came over here and followed me down to Devonshire; at least so he says; but I expect he wanted a change,

and that was only his nice way of putting it. I'll introduce him to you; you'll like him."

She beckoned Mr. Paretta with her fan, and that gentleman came to her instantly, though he appeared to be looking in quite the opposite direction at the moment of her summons.

She made the introduction; the marquis smiled his pleasant smile and slightly inclined his head. Mr. Paretta bowed low, but without a smile or any change of his impassive countenance, and after a moment or two, slid back to his old place.

"He isn't much on conversation," observed Patsy; "but, like the parrot, he's dead nuts on thinkin'. He's always thinkin', and that's how he makes so much money, I suppose. They say he makes thousands a day. Yes; he'll stand like that, looking like a wooden idol, for hours if you'll let him. Lor', how hot it is here! I don't take much stock in that kind of thing." She nodded contemptuously at the mandolin player. "Isn't there some place in the club where I could cool off and get a drink?"

She was about to beckon Mr. Paretta again, but the marquis stopped her with a slight gesture.

"It seems such a pity to disturb him!" he said. "Let me have the honor of taking you, Patsy."

CHAPTER XII.

It was what she wanted. She rose with a smile and slipped her arm through his, and the crowd made way for them.

There was a little room at the Outcasts' to which the members took a visitor when they wanted to talk business with him. Many an angry creditor had been pacified, many an important engagement negotiated in that little room. Some one will tell its history some day, and if all the world will not marvel, it will, at least, be very much amused.

Patsy sank into one of the easy-chairs for which the club was famous, and the marquis sat beside her and held the long drink, with its crushed ice and its projecting straws, which he had obtained for her.

"And so you've been to Devonshire, Patsy!" he said. "It's getting to be quite the fashionable county. You had a good time, I hope?"

"As good as I could, you bet," she replied, bending forward and drawing some of the iced drink through the straw. "Sir William wanted me to go away like an ordinary tourist, but I knew too much for that. I took my own carriage and my own servants. No hired flies and hotel chamber-maids

for me." She spoke like an empress—who had risen from the gutter—might have done. "I went just where I liked and when I liked, so that there was no huntin' up the timetable business or rushin' off to catch a train."

The marquis looked at her with no trace of a sneer or even of amusement on his handsome face, but he was thinking of the time—not so very long ago—when this Sybarite was only too grateful for an outing to Margate or Brighton, and when a "hired fly" was considered a luxury, and a seaside hotel a Palace of Ease.

"And you met a great many people whom you knew, Patsy?"

"Oh, yes," she said. "There was heaps of 'em at Lynmouth and Ilfracombe, and we used to have jolly little suppers and picnics and that kind of thing. I got up one or two dances at some of the big hotels, and you bet, marquis, we made them sit up."

"I'm sure you did," he remarked.

"Yes," she went on. "At one of the places we got up a fancy-dress dance. It was rather a swell hotel, or what they call a swell hotel in those outlandish parts, for the landlord threatened to cut up rough, said his regular customers were shocked—we *did* make a row, I expect. But Mr. Paretta said he'd take the whole hotel if any of the other people left, and that soothed him down. And Mr. Paretta would have done it, too. He doesn't mind spending his money; he'll take a whole hotel or engage a special train or buy the contents of a shop if it suits him, just as you and me—oh, there; I beg your pardon, marquis!"

The marquis smiled. The insolence of the poor little *parvenue* butterfly amused rather than annoyed him.

"Not at all, my dear," he said. "I am quite flattered by the partnership. I am only a poor marquis, burdened by debt and harassed by duns, while you are the Queen of Song and Dance, with a gold mine of Spain or Portugal—or is it Peru?—at your disposal."

The sarcasm passed over her like water from a duck's back.

"Yes, I met a lot of people I know, and had a good time."

"You must tell me all about it," said the marquis. "We must have a little dinner, and you must bring Mr. Paretta, and I'll ask Olive—when he comes back. He is away at present. Don't ask me where. He left London quite suddenly without vouchsafing his address to his devoted uncle."

"And you don't know where he's gone?" she enquired,

glancing at the marquis from the corner of her blue eyes as she manipulated the straws delicately.

"Not in the least," he replied. "I fancy he was rather seedy and off colour; indeed, I know that he was, and I imagine that he has gone somewhere to recuperate. I miss him very much. I am fond of Olive, as you know. I've been expecting to hear from him, and I'm just a little anxious—not much, but just a little. He's rather wild—"

"He is your nephew," said Patsy, with a smile.

The marquis shrugged his shoulders.

"Thanks, my dear. And he hasn't been very strong lately. I hope he is taking care of himself."

"Oh, yes, he's takin' care of himself," she declared, leaning back and smiling significantly.

If she had expected the marquis to start or to express any surprise, she was disappointed; whatever surprise the marquis might feel he was perfectly certain not to express it.

"You know where he is—you have seen him?" he said, quite coolly.

She nodded.

"Yes," she replied. "I know where he is and I have seen him."

"How strange," he murmured. "He is in Devonshire, I suppose."

"Yes," she answered.

"How delightful for him to have met you."

"He didn't meet me," she remarked.

He raised his eyebrows and waited.

"I happened to see him as I was driving from a God-forsaken place called Minehead. My coachman pulled up to ask the way from what he thought was a tramp. It was Lord Olive. He was wandering about the road, with a pipe in his mouth. A pipe! It was at night, but I saw him quite distinctly, though he didn't see me, for I covered myself up and leaned back in the carriage."

"How interesting, how romantic!" murmured the marquis. "Where was that?"

"At a place called Trentishoe," she replied. "A hole in the hills, a hundred miles from everywhere, one of the last places you'd expect to meet Lord Olive Marle in."

The marquis leant back and wiped his lips with his dainty handkerchief. He knew that she had something to tell him, and that she had contrived to bring him to the interview-room to tell it; but he displayed no eagerness to obtain her information.

"Really!" he said. "And you drove on without speaking to him?"

"Yes," she said. "I was rather curious to know what he was doing there—aren't you?"

"Not in the very least," he replied. "I've always made it a rule never to enquire too closely into Clive's proceedings, movements; that is why we continue to be such excellent friends. He goes his way, I go mine. We never clash. When he pleases to tell me of his plans and his projects, I am delighted to receive his confidence; when it does not suit him to confide in me, I possess my soul in patience."

"Then you ain't like me," she said, pursing her lips. "I wanted to know what he was up to, and I determined to find out, and I did."

"What did you discover?" he asked, with a pleasant smile.

"I found out that he was stopping at Trentishoe, at this Trentishoe place, at a farm-house."

"No doubt; for the benefit of his health," murmured the marquis.

"I dare say," she said, with a laugh. "I found out that he was living there under the name of 'Mr.' Marle. That struck me as curious; it would you, wouldn't it?"

"Nothing that Clive would do would strike me as curious," he responded.

"Oh, wouldn't it?" she said. "Well, it did me, and I resolved to get to the bottom of it. I went over one Sunday—to church."

The marquis smiled. The idea of Patsy Pryde going to church appeared to tickle him.

"It's been a long time since I'd been to church. I should think it's a jolly long time since he had been. But there he was, sittin' in a high-backed pew, and lookin' like an angel without wings."

The marquis laughed.

"Forgive me. It is difficult to imagine Olive looking like an angel, with or without wings."

"Well, he did," she said; "and I couldn't help wishin' that I was half as good as he looked. Of course, I knew he was up to some game."

"Of course," murmured the marquis, blandly.

"And so I waited till the other people had crawled out, and watched him."

"How melodramatic!" he commented.

"Wasn't it? Quite the *Adelpai* touch."

Her blue eyes had grown hard, the red lips were drawn rather tightly.

"And what did you see?" he asked, listlessly.

"Well, I was going to tell you. There was some one in the little church playin' the organ very well, and there was some one, a girl or a woman, singin'—well, it was a voice that would have drawn fifty guineas a week at the Frivolity. It struck me all of a heap; for you don't expect that kind of thing in a hole of a place in Devonshire. I waited, and hung round the corner—"

"Like a detective," interjected the marquis in a low tone.

"—Till Lord Olive came out. He went as far as the church gate, then he waited too; and presently a blind old man and a pretty girl came out of the church."

"You are sure she was pretty?" murmured the marquis.

Patsy tossed her head and looked at him sharply.

"You think I don't know a pretty girl when I see her. Do you think we women can't admire a good-lookin' woman as much as you men? Oh, yes, we can. I tell you, this was one of the loveliest girls I ever saw, and I've seen a good many."

The marquis nodded.

"And this divinity fully accounts for Olive's presence at this benighted spot?" he asked in an easy tone.

Patsy Pride looked at him.

"You take it coolly," she said. "You don't seem to understand."

He smiled again.

"What is there so difficult to understand?" he demanded.

"That Olive is always caught by a pretty face is one, indeed, my only cause of complaint against him. We Marles, my dear Patsy, as you know, are a susceptible race. Beauty, as the poet remarks, draws us by a single hair. It may draw us far, but—er—it does not draw us long. After all, a hair is not a very strong chain, and it is easily broken."

An angry flush rose to her brow.

"That's meant for me, I suppose?" she said.

"My dear Patsy!" he murmured.

"What you mean," she said—"what you mean is, that Olive has taken a fancy to this girl, and that it's only what you call a—what is it?—an escapade? You're wrong."

"As how?" enquired the marquis, with a drawl, extending the glass.

She took a drink and sank back.

"The girl I saw is not of that sort. She is what even you would call a lady."

"Not the village maiden with the pail and milking-stool under her arm?" said the marquis.

"Not by no manner of means," replied Patsy Pryde, emphatically. "She's a lady, I tell you, and Lord Clive is over head and heels in love with her."

The marquis smiled.

"May one without presumption enquire how you know that?" he asked.

She looked at him under her lowered lids, and with a half-contemptuous, half-pitying smile.

"How do I know it?" she retorted. "Why, I saw him; I saw him quite plainly. I tell you he's quite gone on her."

The marquis still smiled.

"Clive has been gone on so many women, my dear Patsy!" he murmured. "But his infatuation has never been more than a transient one. It is always so with us Marles."

She made a little impatient movement.

"Yes; but you are always caught at last. Some woman always manages to hook you, and Lord Clive has been caught, has been hooked by this girl."

"You mean—"

—"That he will marry her," she said.

The marquis did not move a muscle. He still smiled, and regarded her with a half-amused, half-patient expression on his well-preserved face.

"My dear, I think you—exaggerate," he said, placidly.

"Oh, no, I don't," she returned. "I sized the girl up in a moment, and I saw by Lord Clive's manner that he meant business. He'll marry that girl, you mark my words."

For a moment the marquis's smile vanished, and the expression of his face changed to one of intense gravity. She looked at him through her half-closed eyes with intent watchfulness.

"That would be a pretty kettle of fish, wouldn't it?" she said. "This girl is the daughter of a blind organist, or something of that kind. A mere nobody; hasn't a penny, I should think."

"You appear to have made full enquiries, my dear Patsy."

"I did," she admitted, frankly. "Look here, marquis, I don't mind Clive's breaking with me that he might marry Lady Blanche Westley, but I *do* strike at his chucking me up to marry a blind organist's daughter. That's playing it a bit too low."

The marquis leant back and stroked his moustache. He

smiled again, and his white fingers were as steady as his smile; but there was anger in his heart.

"It wouldn't suit you either," she resumed. "You want him to marry Lady Blanche, don't you? She's got no end of coin, and you *want* it."

"We do; we always did, my dear," he said.

"Very well, then; if you don't look out, you'll lose it. I tell you, Clive's in love with this girl, and if he isn't prevented, he'll marry her."

"God forbid!" broke from the marquis's lips, with a solemn devoutness which was most impressive. "What is to be done?"

Patsy Pryde looked at him.

"That's for you to say," she retorted. "I'd do a great deal, I'd go a long way, a jolly long way, to prevent it. Look here"—she leant forward and gripped the velvet arms of the chair with her bediamonded white paws—"I don't mind standing aside for Lady Blanche; that's all right enough; we have to do it; it's the way things go; but I don't fancy giving him up for a blind organist's daughter in a God-forsaken place in Devonshire. That goes against the grain—very much against the grain—and I'm willing to do anything I can to help you."

The marquis leant back and pulled at—not stroked now—his moustache.

"What the devil can we do?" he asked, under his breath. "Clive *must* marry Lady Blanche. The money is necessary. What can we do?"

"That's for you to find out," she retorted. "Anyhow, I'm ready to help you. He isn't going to marry an organist's daughter if I can prevent it. Come; you've got plenty of brains, and can hit upon some plan for stopping him. If the two of us can't put a spoke in her wheel, it will be a strange thing. Anyway, I'll help you."

She held out her hand, and the marquis took it and pressed it. He was too much moved, too deeply agitated to say a word.

A gentleman entered the room, and a voice, with a slightly foreign accent, said:

"Are you ready, Miss Patsy?"

It was Paretta. Patsy Pryde rose and drew her cloud round her.

"Is it all over?" she asked. "Yes, I'm quite ready. Good-night, marquis." Then in a lower voice, she whispered: "Remember, I will help you."

And at that moment, in the Enchanted Valley, Olive and Beryl were sitting side by side, rapt in Love's Young Dream, and little thinking that two such clever and astute individuals as the Marquis of Doyme and Miss Patsy Pryde had combined to separate them.

CHAPTER XIII.

ONE speaks of this period in Beryl's Frayne's life with bated breath.

Her life had been happy enough hitherto, but now—ah, well, this world, which most of us find so commonplace and wearisome, had become an earthly Paradise. She lay awake sometimes in her little room under the thatch, asking herself what she had done to be so happy; whether it were all true and real, or whether she were only asleep and dreaming. She looked back upon her past life with a kind of wonder, and surprise, and pity: how could she have been so happy in her past life without Clive?

Beryl had had no past flirtations, no "experiences of the heart," to dim the bright joy which her love for Clive Marle produced. It was all new to her; so new and strange, that she sometimes felt bewildered by the emotion it aroused.

The warm, passionate blood of Italy ran in her veins, and her love was too deep and too profound to find vent in the ordinary expression. She no longer sang to herself as she moved about the house; a sweet gravity shone in her eyes, her voice was even lower than it was wont to be. When she was alone, she would sit on the terrace, or stand by the rocks on the sea, and look out at the ever-changing mass of water with dreamy eyes.

But she was not often alone. Clive was never really happy unless he was by her side. He, too, was living in an earthly Paradise. A marvellous change had come over his life. It was as if a man, dragging wearily across a desert, had suddenly found himself in a cool valley, shaded by violet hills, green with stately trees, musical with the bubbling of a brook and the song of the birds. It is scarcely too much to say that he almost *forgot* his past life, that he dated his life from the hour in which he had first seen Beryl; before that wondrous epoch he had not lived, but only existed.

He forgot, thrust from him, the knowledge that he was living in a fool's paradise; that, at any moment, Beryl or her father might discover who he was, and become acquainted with his past career. It was only when he was away from

her that the dread and fear of discovery smote him like a sharp pain; they did not assail him when he was with her.

He never spoke of his past, and she asked no questions; they were too fully occupied in living in the present, in drinking from the cup of joy which the gods had placed in their hands. They were in love's land, that land on which the sun always shines, in which the birds always sing, the flowers always bloom, and across which the shadows of grief and pain, of sorrow and remorse, never fall.

His love for her grew daily. To him, the sweet gravity which had fallen upon her served but to heighten her beauty. In the new and strangely tender tones of her voice was a magic which had power to thrill him to the innermost core. His heart was full of pride and love for her. He was proud of her rare loveliness, of her exquisite grace, of her voice, which he knew, though he was no musician, to be an extraordinary one.

There is no medicine in the world like happiness, and it had done more for Clive even than Sir William Fagan's prescription. He looked five years younger; there was the spring of health and strength in his step; his eyes were bright, his face tanned, and no longer drawn and haggard. The change in him was so wonderful as to be almost miraculous. But Love has still power to work miracles.

They met every day. Sometimes they went fishing, but, favourable though the weather might be, they did not catch many trout; sometimes they drove across the moor; but the chestnut was allowed to go his own pace, and very often pulled up and nibbled at the sweet, short grass, unheeded by the happy couple behind; sometimes they wandered through the wonderful valley of rocks, walking hand in hand, and saying little—for what is there for lips to speak when heart sings to heart a sweeter song than any mere words can frame?

Nearly every evening Clive went up to Hill Cote. Mr. Frayne was always glad to see him, and would talk of his work, his past small successes and his hopes for the future; sometimes he would go to the organ, and play, and then Clive's hand would steal towards Beryl's, and they would sit listening silently. Then Beryl would play or sing, and Clive would watch her with that in his eyes which would have disclosed his secret if the father had not been blind.

Indeed, it was strange that Mr. Frayne failed to discover the truth; but he was absorbed in his work, and still regarded Beryl as a child, or, rather, as one so set apart from the world as to be safe from any danger of falling in love. For the last

week or two he had been somewhat unwell. He was never very strong, and always averse to the slightest physical exertion; he rarely left the cottage, except to go to church, and of late he seemed to dislike, or to be too weak, to walk upon the terrace; but he made no complaint, and to the anxious enquiries that Beryl sometimes made, he always replied that he was quite well, and only a little languid and tired; but he was never too tired to talk to Olive, or to listen while he read some verses or stories from the magazines which Olive had ordered from London.

Fancy Olive Merle reading verses and short stories to a blind man, in a "benighted hole" in Devonshire! A change, indeed!

One evening Beryl and Olive were seated on the rock from which he had swum on the night of his arrival. Beryl was sitting with her knees drawn up, and her arms round them, and he was lying at her feet, his eyes fixed on hers, which rested dreamily on the opaline sea. They had been silent for some minutes, and at last Olive said in a low voice:

"A thousand pounds for your thoughts, dearest."

She turned her eyes upon him slowly, with the tender light which always dawned in them when she looked upon him.

"You shall have them for nothing," she said. "I was wondering whether there was ever a girl, since the world began, so happy as I am."

"Are you so happy?" he replied. "I'm glad. But I wonder whether there was ever a girl, since the world began, who deserved to be so happy?"

"That's just it," she said. "What have I done to deserve it? When I think of the thousands of women who at this moment are alone and solitary and unhappy because they are— are unloved, I feel half ashamed, half remorseful, that I should be so full of joy. Sometimes the thought frightens me. Father says that the gods sometimes grow envious of mortals when they're too happy; I wonder whether any god is getting angry with me. I hope not."

This was a little beyond Olive, who, though Beryl thought him semi-divine, was only a stupid Man.

"Why shouldn't you be happy?" she asked. "I mean to keep you so all your life. What is there to fear?"

"I don't know," she said. "It is foolish, and I ought not to have said it; but I have got into the habit of telling you everything"—she unclasped her hands, and one of them touched his face—"though sometimes I think it isn't neces-

sary to tell you; it seems as if you knew without my speaking. I shall always be happy, Olive, while you are near me."

"That will be for the rest of my life," he said.

"For the rest of your life," she murmured to herself, with the indrawing of her breath. The thought was almost too vast, too sweet. "I often say that to myself when I am alone, and it is the sweetest thing I can think or say. I couldn't live without you now, Olive."

She said it with a smile; but the tone, the look, thrilled through him.

"Nor I without you, Beryl," he responded. "Life wouldn't be worth living if I were to lose you. But I'm not going to lose you. I'm not particularly clever, but I know when I've got a good thing."

He turned over, and looked up at her with a smile on his handsome face, and Beryl laughed softly. The retort, notwithstanding its lack of sentiment, was just the one to please a woman.

"But you cannot stay here always, Olive," she said.

"Can't I?" he replied. "I don't know. Why not? I'm too happy here to leave it!"

She looked at him with faint surprise.

"But your business, your work?"

Olive averted his face. "Oh, ah; yes," he said, as if he had suddenly remembered. "I may have to run up to London now and again, but it will only be for a short time. I should like to live here all my life. I have never been so happy anywhere, and I'm fond of every stick and stone in the place; and for a very good reason."

"What is that?" she asked, innocently.

"Because a certain young lady lives in it, and loves it," he answered.

As he spoke, he asked himself whether it would be possible to marry her, to conceal his identity, to remain "Mr." Marle, and to go on living with Beryl Frayne as his wife—his wife!—in the Enchanted Valley. He stifled a sigh at the thought. If he could only be "Mr." Marle, with no past, with just a small income, with a tiny farm on the brow of one of the hills! He pictured the idyllic life they would lead, the wealth of serene happiness which such a life would hold, and a shadow crossed his face as he realised the impossibility of such a course. He wanted to marry her at once; but how was he to do it?

"Why are you so thoughtful?" asked Beryl.

"I was thinking," he began, hesitatingly, almost inclined

to tell her something of, if not all, the truth, when a voice, coming from behind them, shouted his name.

It was one of the Jennings' curly-headed boys, and he was waving a letter in his brown paw. He came towards them, walking, boy-like, in the stream.

"Look at that little beggar!" said Clive, watching him with a lazy, contented smile. "He doesn't care who pays for his boots."

"It's only lately they've worn them," replied Beryl. "Is that a letter he is holding up?"

"It looks like it," said Clive. "It must be for you. Come out of the water, you young rascal!"

The boy grinned, and clambering up the rock, touched his front curls, and held out the letter to Clive.

"Postman's just brought un, sir," he said. "Mother said as how you'd p'r'aps like to have it, so I brought un."

Clive took the letter, and, having sent the boy bounding homeward with a shilling clasped in his hot hand, glanced at the envelope. It was stamped with the Doyne crest in blue and gold, and, with a slight frown, he thrust the letter in his pocket.

Beryl looked at him with a slight surprise.

"Are you not going to read it?" she asked. "It may be important. All letters seem important to me; I get so few."

"Oh, I don't expect it's anything very important," he said; and reluctantly he took the letter from his pocket, and opened and read it. It was from the marquis, and ran thus:

"MY DEAR CLIVE,—In the words of the song, I have been wailing for some weeks past, 'Alice, where art Thou?' But, as I trust impertinent curiosity is not numbered among my many small vices, I refrained from putting the question to any one but myself until yesterday. But I was constrained to ask Parsons for your address, because Fleming has been worrying me for some weeks past about a matter of business in which you are concerned. He wants you to look at, or to sign, some deeds connected with the Portrea estate, and, although I told him, as usual, and in your pet phrase, 'not to worry,' I regret to say he insists upon worrying me, and so, very reluctantly, I am compelled to worry you. He says he must see you—you know Fleming's 'must'!—and I must either send him down to you, or beg you to come up and see him, or I tell you candidly our good Fleming will harass me to death. And I am young to die! Let me know which course you will prefer.

"I should like to ask you what the devil you are doing in the benighted spot in which you have buried yourself for the last few weeks, but I would not be guilty of such rudeness for a king's ransom; but I must candidly confess that all sorts of horrible visions cross my mind, and set me shuddering with apprehension. Have you foresworn the world, which your presence gladdens and adorns, and retired to some lonely hut beside the sad sea waves? Can it be possible that you are writing a book—say, of poems? Have you retired from civilisation to grow a beard? The thought is too horrible! Forgive it, and ascribe it to the emotion which your prolonged absence causes me.

"Seriously, my dear Clive, we are all desolate without you. I shun your friends at the club because they *will* ask me for tidings of you. Only yesterday Wally approached me, with tears in his eyes, and, seeing them, and dreading the inevitable question, I turned and fled. Pray come back, my dear boy, to a disconsolate uncle, and a world which mourns your loss!

"Yours, with affectionate anxiety, DOYNE.

"P.S.—Candlestick lost the race, and I am, as Wally would say, stone-broke. Can you lend me half a crown?

"P.P.S.—There was a dance at the Dorchesters' last night; hot and crowded, but otherwise delightful. Blanche was there, of course. Really, I think she grows more beautiful and queenly every day. In vulgar parlance, she was 'the belle of the ball,' and I had great difficulty in getting near her. She deigned to ask after you, and my voice was choked with emotion as I was constrained to reply, in something like the words of the idiotic song, 'I don't know where 'e are!'"

The frown deepened on Clive's face as he read this characteristic epistle. What an idiot he had been to send for the horses and the cart, and so betray his whereabouts! What should he do? He could not let Fleming, the steward, come down to Trentishoe. He was a sharp man of business, keen-sighted, and acute; he would be certain to discover Clive's reason for remaining in this "benighted" place. And, as he could not let Fleming come to him, he must go to Fleming. He thrust the letter in his pocket impatiently.

Beryl had been looking out to sea, dreamily, but his movement drew her eyes upon him.

"What is the matter, Clive?" she asked, as she saw his face; and a sudden apprehension smote her. "Is there bad news in your letter?"

"Yes, in a sense, dearest," he replied. "No, no; don't

be frightened!" for her face had grown pale. "It's only that I shall have to go up to London, I'm afraid."

She drew a breath of relief, but she was still pale.

"That is bad enough news—for me," she said in a low voice, and trying to keep her lips from quivering, and her eyes from filling with the tears that threatened to rise to them.

"And for me, too," he responded in as low a voice. The thought of leaving her was like a dead weight on his heart. "The letter's from a relation—he wants to see me on business. I'm afraid—I'm sure, in fact—I've got to go."

She tried to smile, and her hand slid into his, and closed tightly over it.

"Of course, you must go!" she said, forcing herself to speak cheerfully. "Will—will you be away long?"

He got up then.

"No, no," he answered. "Only a few days. Confound it!—I beg your pardon, dearest! Forgive me! If you knew how I hate the thought of leaving you even for a day. If there were only a way of getting out of it! But I see none."

He could not let Fleming come to Trentishoe.

"Of course, you must go!" she said again. "You will not be gone long, though every day will seem a month to me! Oh, how selfish I am!"

"If you call that selfishness, please go on with it," he returned, trying to speak lightly, for he dreaded to see the tears in her eyes again. "If I catch the evening train at Ilfracombe, I can go by the mail; it will save half, nearly the whole of a day; and I shall be back all the sooner."

She rose at once.

"Yes, oh, yes! And it will be cooler travelling by night. But you will sleep; won't you be tired?" she added, anxiously.

He laughed.

"No; if I know myself, I shall be too busy thinking of a certain young lady to sleep; and as to being tired! Good gracious, look at me! I am as strong as a horse now; a very different kind of man from the one who was locked inside the church porch a few weeks ago."

He took her in his arms, and held her to his heart, and she looked up at him, with all her love in her eyes.

It was their first parting, and what it cost her only a woman can tell; but she kept the tears back until he had left her; and even then they fell slowly—for Beryl was not one who "cried with ease."

Olive took Jennings to bring the cart back, and caught the train. He slept through part of the journey, and thought or

dreamt of Beryl through the whole of it. He was conscious of a feeling of amazement at the depth of his love for her. He had read of the tender passion in prose and verse, and had always smiled at the "extravagant" language with which the authors described their lovers' emotions; but he felt that no language could be too extravagant in which to describe the aching of his heart as the train swept him away from Beryl Frayne.

CHAPTER XIV.

HE had wired to Parsons, and a brougham was waiting at Paddington, and at home Parsons had the bath ready, and a cup of coffee.

He stared at his master's burnt face and changed appearance.

"You are better, my lord," he ventured to remark; and Clive nodded and laughed.

"Yes, thanks, Parsons. I'm as fit as a fiddle. Any letters? But, of course, there are."

He turned over the pile on his writing-table. The half of the heap consisted of bills, the other of invitations.

"Town empty, I suppose?" he asked.

"No, my lord; a great many people are still here. The House is still sitting, you know, my lord."

"Is it?" said Clive, with a smile. "I didn't know. I haven't seen a paper since I left."

Parsons glanced at him, and poured out some more coffee, with a reflective air. He was asking himself what the devil his master had been up to; for Parsons had learnt that, whenever Lord Clive Marle looked particularly well and cheerful, he had most assuredly been "up to something or other."

Clive opened his letters. The bills struck him as more numerous than they had ever been, and there were several pressing requests for immediate payment. What a pile of money he had spent, or, rather, owed, for—what? Gloves, cigarettes, horses, suppers, and driving-parties; flowers—the florist's account was a ghastly one—jewellery for presents; all the thousand and one trifles which a man in his position regards as necessities. Half the money he had spent during the last five years would make him rich enough to marry Beryl. He pitched the pile of letters from him.

"Sort out those that must be paid, Parsons," he said, "and I'll give you a cheque."

Then he dressed, and, a little after noon, walked across the

Park to the Doyme mansion. It was one of the handsomest houses in London, and was splendidly appointed.

"I think his lordship is up; I'll send for Mr. Godwin, my lord." Godwin was the marquis's valet, and he came down the broad stairs with its statuary and palms, and bowed low before the heir.

"The marquis is at breakfast, my lord," he said in a low voice—all the Doyme household spoke softly, as if they were the retainers of royalty; but this man's was always lower than the other servants, and he had a trick of looking under his lids with a glance of covert keenness. He was not only the marquis's valet, but his confidential servant—almost secretary; and it was said, and with truth, that he had helped his master to acquire the title of the "Wicked" Lord Doyme. To put it shortly, the man was an admirable valet, a first-rate secretary, and a born detective. It was from Godwin that the marquis learnt all the secrets, the intrigues, the scandals of the world in which he moved. And yet so acute, so skilful, was the man, that no one ever suspected him of being more than an ordinary valet. The marquis paid him a large salary; and it was paid regularly, however low his lordship's coffers might be.

Clive followed him up to the marquis's room; an apartment dainty enough for a lady. The tall windows, looking upon the garden, were wide open, and Doyme sat at breakfast under the awning on the flower-decked balcony. He was dressed in a light cashmere suit, and looked almost as young as Clive.

"My dear boy!" he exclaimed, with his charming smile, as he extended a white, cool hand, "how good of you! Sit down!"

The valet placed a lounge chair in the proper position, and, without waiting to be told, began to lay a second cup and saucer.

"Don't trouble," said Clive; "I've breakfasted already."

"Really! How unkind! Some hock and seltzer, Godwin, and the cigarettes—ah, they are here, I see. My dear boy, it really is angelic of you to come so promptly. Frankly, I did not expect you for a week! But"—slowly, and with soft emphasis—"what—have—you been doing? My dear Clive, you look like our old friend, the village blacksmith! Your face is like the tan, and your whole appearance so bucolic and aggressively healthy, that I really am afraid that you have gone in for farming!"

Olive smiled.

"I've been in a warm place."

"Lying on your back under a roasting sun, I should imagine," said the marquis, regarding him with a mixture of amusement and admiration. "Tan suits you, Clive—good heavens, it's on your hands, too!" he broke off, as Clive took off his gloves. "Holding the plough has produced that mahogany shade, I suppose?"

"I've been fishing," replied Olive; "one doesn't wear gloves, you know, sir."

"Happy youth!" commented Doyne, with an exaggerated sigh. "What would I give to feel so well, and look so brown!"

Olive laughed. He knew that the marquis would rather die than permit his complexion to get sunburnt. A footman brought the wine, and Olive took a glass, but refused the cigarette. The uncle regarded his nephew with veiled curiosity.

"Given up tobacco, Clive?"

"No, sir; I've taken to a pipe."

Doyne set down his cup, and leant back.

"Really! You've taken to a pipe! How incredible it sounds! A—er—long clay pipe, now?"

Olive laughed.

"Not quite so bad as that, sir," he said. "Don't be alarmed; I'm not going to smoke it now."

"Do! I should like to see you!" But Olive shook his head.

"And so Fleming wants to see me?" he said.

The marquis took up his cup and sipped his tea delicately.

"Yes; I'm so sorry! It's about the Portrea estate." The Portrea estate had been the property of Clive's mother, and had passed to him. "Fleming says that it will be necessary to raise a second mortgage; that is, if he can. He doesn't feel sure of being able to do so. Land is in a parlous state just now, and the first mortgage almost, if not quite, covers the present value."

Olive frowned.

"Is it as bad as that?" he demanded, gravely.

"My dear boy, it is always as bad as that—when it doesn't happen to be worse," responded the marquis, quite cheerfully. "According to Fleming, we are perpetually on the brink of ruin. He was in such depths of despair when he was here the other morning that I quite pitied him. I insisted on his taking a couple of glasses of champagne in the middle of his statement, for I felt that the poor man would break down completely unless he had some stimulant immediately."

He smiled so blandly, spoke with such indolent nonchalance, that one who did not know him would have found it difficult to believe that he was speaking of their own affairs. Clive leant back, and looked straight before him.

"Where is Fleming?" he asked. "I will see him to-day, and get the thing done."

"Why such hot haste, my dear Clive?"

"I want to get back to Devonshire," said Clive, quietly.

The marquis smiled up his sleeve.

"Really! You want to go back? Well, I'm not surprised, seeing the improvement the place has wrought in your health. But I'm sorry. Fleming has gone down to Doyne; he left last night, and will not be back for two or three days. I'd no idea you'd come up so soon."

Clive sighed. He had actually thought of tearing back to Trentishoe and Beryl on the morrow.

"Confound him! Why couldn't he have stopped in London?" he said, impatiently.

"The man's a nuisance; all business men are," murmured Doyne, sympathetically. "I've told him so repeatedly. I'm afraid that you will have to possess your soul in patience until he comes back, unless you'd like me to send him down to you at—what's the name of the place? I'll do that if you prefer it."

"No, no!" said Clive, rather promptly. "I must wait."

"London is hateful, positively hateful, just now," went on the marquis, in a slow, soft voice, and with eyes half closed; "but there are several people in it, and really I'm too lazy to move until I'm obliged. After all, at my years, a man is more comfortable in his town house than anywhere else, let the weather be what it may. And now, you want the news, I suppose? I told you Candlestick lost? Pity, wasn't it? I had backed it heavily, and Fleming says—ah, well, you know what Fleming would say, without my telling you. But this time he was really worse than usual; he actually hinted at there being some difficulty in raising your allowance. Of course, I told him that he *must* manage that, whoever and whatever else went short."

Clive looked up.

"You are very good, sir," he said in a low voice.

"Yes; I really think I am," assented the marquis, with complacent candour. "I am like the good uncle in a fairy story. But don't give me credit for more than I deserve. I happen to be fond of you, my dear boy, and it comes easy to play the part of avuncular generosity."

He paused a moment as he waved his white hand toward the bottle of hock standing in its silver ice-pail. "And, then, I know that you will not need my liberality long."

Clive started slightly, and lowered his eyes.

The marquis smiled, and laid his hand on Clive's arm lightly.

"When you are married to Blanche, and have become the husband of a millionairess, you must spare half an hour now and again to visit your poor uncle in his workhouse retreat. Or do you think I could get an almshouse? I should prefer that. You will bring me little presents of tea and tobacco, and sometimes even manage to smuggle in a bottle of wine."

Clive made no response; but a heavy weight seemed suddenly to have descended upon his head.

"How one hates the idea of matrimony!" resumed Doyne, fanning himself with his delicately-perfumed handkerchief. "It is almost as bad as death and the taxes. But, alas! for such as you and me it is as inevitable. And it is not all men who are so fortunate as you, my dear Clive. The gods, when they decreed matrimony for you, were kind enough to provide you with a bride both rich and beautiful; a combination as charming as it is rare. There are twenty men whom I could name who are dying of love for Blanche, and who would marry her if she hadn't a penny; and they languish hopelessly, while you have but to throw your handkerchief! Oh, fortunate youth!"

Clive bent forward, with an impatient movement, and leant his head on his hand.

"Why do you speak of her in that way, sir?" he demanded, grimly.

The marquis regarded him with a fine smile.

"Cultivate that modesty, my dear Clive; it is as precious as it is unique. I wonder where you got it from? I have it, I know, but it has not often shown itself in my family."

Clive laughed, but grimly.

"Seriously, my dear boy, I think that the time has now arrived when the handkerchief should be thrown—"

"For God's sake, don't use that simile again!" Clive broke in, with a kind of suppressed indignation.

"Forgive me! I won't offend again. And forgive me for venturing to offer advice on so delicate a subject; but—ah, well! you shall hear Fleming's account of our position! And why hesitate—why, my dear Clive? Is she not everything that a man could desire? I assure you that there is not a

lovelier girl in London! But you, with your good taste, do not need my assurance—”

Olive half rose, and then sank back. For one moment, the wild idea of telling the marquis the truth actually occurred to him; but before the moment could pass, Doyme went on:

“Now, there would be some excuse for delay and hesitation if the lady were like Miss Goldstein; and, really, I am not altogether surprised at young Lestrangle’s madness.”

“What has he done?” asked Olive, only too glad to switch, even a little way, off the subject.

“Haven’t you heard?” asked the marquis, in his turn, raising his brows with surprise. “Ah, no, I forgot; you have been buried alive in that place with the extraordinary name, and have lost touch of the world. Well, a week before the day fixed for his marriage with Miss Goldstein, the young ass bolted with the daughter of a farmer who had been keeping some of his horses. The daughter of a farmer!”

Doyme leant back, laughed softly, and then sighed.

“He fell in love with her?” queried Olive, moodily.

“That is the accepted phrase,” assented the marquis, placidly. “He fell in love with her. He wasn’t in love with Miss Goldstein, of course. No one could expect the poor boy to be! But the Lestranges are very nearly on their last legs, and the Goldstein *père* is worth tons of money; all of which tons would come to her. And the settlement—well, I’m told it was something like thirty thousand a year. And the young ass throws up such an income, such prospects, for—a farmer’s daughter!”

Olive sat silent, his head upon his hand, and the marquis stole a keen glance at him.

“Old Lestrangle came to me with the news. The poor old man almost broke down; indeed, there were tears in his eyes. He was half mad with rage, and though he was very fond of the boy, I was not at all surprised to hear that he had cut him off with less than the proverbial shilling. He stopped the young fool’s allowance the moment he heard of the marriage.”

There was a pause.

“I’ve a tender heart, you know, my dear Olive, but I really could not blame the old man. In fact”—he paused to flick a lady-bird from his coat, and watched the insect circle in the air and fall, quivering in its tiny death pang—“in fact, it is what I myself should have done. The trouble, the infinite pains, the Lestranges went through to secure the Goldstein girl! And the young ass flaunts a farmer’s daughter in their

face! Such ingratitude deserves a severe punishment; and it will get it, I am glad to say."

"What has become of them?" asked Clive, gloomily.

The marquis shrugged his shoulders.

"I hear that they are living in lodgings in some continental town; Boulogne or some such place. And one knows what such a life must be, and what it will end in. They'll grow to hate each other before six months are out. *He* will loathe her for dragging him down to her level, and she'll loathe him for loathing her. Sounds like one of the modern poets, doesn't it? But it's as true as prose. I know. I've seen the end of that kind of marriage. Young Lestrangle had far better have drowned himself and the wretched girl in her father's duck pond."

Clive stared at the trees in the garden below them.

"His father may relent," he said; "he was fond of Lestrangle."

"Fond? Oh, yes; but he won't relent. I know exactly what he feels. I'm afraid I should entertain the same sentiment. Scratch us, and we are savages just below the outer cuticle, my dear Clive. No; the foolish young idiot has ruined his own life and the girl's. He'll descend to billiard-marking—he used to play a good game, didn't he?—and she"—he shrugged his shoulders—"one can guess what will become of her; music-teaching, type-writing, clear-starching and ironing; anything that a farmer's daughter can manage to earn money at. Shocking, isn't it?"

Clive made no response. The idea of telling his uncle of Beryl was completely crushed. He rose.

"Well, I must wait for Fleming, I suppose?" he said.

"I'm afraid so," murmured Doyne. "I'll send him round to you immediately he comes back. By-the-way, there is a dance at the Pattersons' to-night. You'll find a card amongst your letters, I expect. Better go, dear boy. I shall look forward to seeing you again. Blanche will be there."

Clive stood with lowered lids and compressed lips—he looked very like the marquis at that moment—and quite a minute passed before he replied:

"Yes; I'll go, sir."

Doyne held out his slim white hand, and smiled up at the handsome face—almost stern at that moment—with an affectionate smile.

"Till then, my dear boy!" he murmured. "Gad, how well you look! I wish I could change places with you, my dear Clive! Ah, youth, youth!"

He waved his hands with a gesture admirably suited to the sentiment, and sank back with closed eyes. But as the door of the room closed, and Olive's footsteps descended the stairs, the marquis sat up quickly, and his expression changed.

"Patsy's right!" he muttered. "He means to marry the girl. The fool! I saw it in his face. The insensate ass!"

He struck a silver gong twice, and sharply, and Godwin came to his side noiselessly, and stood waiting, in exactly the proper attitude, with eyes downcast and hands at his side.

The marquis had sunk back in his lounge chair, with his usual indolent air.

"Godwin," he said in a low and languid voice, "let me know where Lord Olive goes, and what he does while he is in town, will you, please?"

The man raised his eyes for a moment, and looked keenly at his master, then he said, softly, "Yes, my lord."

He waited a moment, then turned to go; but Doyne stopped him with a gesture.

"There's a young woman in the case, Godwin!"

The man lifted his eyes again, and a swift flash of intelligence passed across them.

"Yes, my lord."

The marquis let his hands fall, as if he had said all that was necessary, and Godwin inclined his head as if he had learnt all that he needed.

"An invaluable servant, Godwin," murmured Doyne, looking after him. And the adjective was not an extravagant one.

CHAPTER XV.

CLIVE walked slowly back to his rooms, much troubled. Did his uncle suspect anything, know anything of Olive's reason for his long stay at Trentishoe, and his desire to get back there as soon as possible? It seemed impossible that he should do so. Clive had met no one whom he knew; the marquis could not even remember the name of the place. And yet it almost seemed to Clive that his uncle had told him the story of young Lestrangle's "folly" with an object. Clive was quite convinced that Doyne would treat him with as much severity as old Lestrangle had treated his son. The marquis was quite capable of cutting off his allowance and sending him adrift if he were to commit, what Lord Doyne would consider, the "crime" of marrying a girl without position and without money.

In a word, if his uncle were to discover Olive's engagement

to Beryl, and his intentions of marrying her, he would be ruined. Clive was always swimming in a sea of debt, just contriving to keep his head above water by spasmodic payments on account; and his creditors trusted him and were patient because it was believed that he would marry Lady Blanche Westley, whose immense wealth would enable him to pay all his debts and to continue a good and profitable customer. The moment even a rumour of the breaking off of the match reached them, they would swoop down upon him like a flock of vultures.

Lady Blanche! Clive grew more troubled as he thought of her. In the world of the Upper Ten, marriage is frequently a matter of bargain and arrangement. Sometimes love is a part of the contract, sometimes it is not; the world in which Clive moved does not set very much store on love; rank, money, a high place amongst men, these are what count most with it. It had always been understood by the Westleys and the Doynes that Clive and Lady Blanche should marry; almost from her cradle, Lady Blanche had been taught to regard him as her future husband. This should have been quite sufficient to make her dislike him; but women found it hard to dislike Clive Marle, and Lady Blanche loved him.

He had never spoken a word of love to her, but he had always been fond of her in a lukewarm fashion; from childhood, they had been very much together; had played cricket in the Doyne meadows; had ridden their ponies side by side; had danced together at children's parties; and, as they grew up, Clive had rendered her the close attentions, and she had received them, which lovers pay and take as a matter of course.

Lady Blanche knew that Clive would not make an early marriage. Young men of his class like to have their fling; a certain quantity of wild oats has to be sown; and she looked on, smilingly patient, while Clive made the world ring with his wild and reckless deeds, and sowed his oats with a lavish hand. In time he would grow weary of the follies which some men make the serious business of their lives, and would come to her for the love with which she was ready to endow him.

He had been very weary lately, and very ill, and she thought, as Doyne thought, that the time when he would desire to settle down was approaching. Sooner or later she would be his wife; she just lived for this, and possessed her soul in patience.

All this Clive knew and thought over as he walked along. What was he to say to Blanche? If he had actually proposed to her, if their engagement had been duly ratified and an-

nounced, his course would have been easier for him. He could have gone to her and told her—well, that he had been false to her, and that he loved another woman; but a man can scarcely go to a girl to whom he is not engaged, and say, “See here; I know you love me, though I have never asked you for your love, but I don’t love you, and I do love another girl, and intend to marry her.”

It was very hot, and the perspiration stood on his brow, as he flung his hat into a corner of his carefully-shaded room, and sank into a chair. Once more the thought, the desire, stirred within him: if he were only a poor City clerk, with thirty shillings a week and free to marry Beryl Frayne!

He went down to the club, and got some lunch; that is to say, he ate a morsel or two of the salmon mayonnaise and a galantine which the footman brought him; and as he was pushing his plate away, Lord Wally sauntered in, with his straw hat on the back of his head, and his hands thrust deep in his pockets. At sight of Clive he made a melodramatic start, and went through all the elaborate business of a swoon.

“It’s his ghost; I know it is!” he exclaimed, with stimulated terror. “It isn’t Clive, but his shadow painted red. When I speak to him, he’ll shake his head like Banquo, and vanish into thin air.”

“Sit down, you young idiot,” said Clive. “Sit down, and tell me the news.”

Wally sank into a chair, and laid his hand on Clive’s.

“My dear old chap, where have you been?” he exclaimed. “How fit you’re looking; quite another man! You’re a pretty kind of fellow to slope off, and leave us sweltering in the heat! Where have you been?”

“To Devonshire,” said Clive. “Have some wine?”

He filled Lord Wally’s glass, and the lad looked over it curiously as he drank.

“I’ve been away for some time, and don’t know the news. What is it?” asked Clive.

Wally asked no more questions, but began to rattle off the gossip and scandal of the town.

“Lestranger has gone a mucker—”

“I know all that,” said Clive, with a touch of impatience.

“Oh, do you? Yes, it was in the papers. Patsy’s back at the Empress, fit as a fiddle, and in splendid form again; but perhaps you know that?”

Olive shook his head. Patsy Pryde’s return to the scene of her triumphs and her physical condition did not interest him—now.

"Old Vavasour married; rich widow, fat, fair, and more than forty; and my cousin Dick's gone back to Africa. We gave him a send-off one night last week, and we all wished you were there. It was a splendid function; Brady and I had to put Dick to bed, poor old chap! Though, 'pon my word, I'm half inclined to envy him. He's had a splendid time over there, and he's going back with the prospect of a row."

Olive listened rather absently, and, if it must be confessed, without very much interest. And yet this man of whom they were speaking was a close friend of his. But his love for Beryl seemed to have absorbed all old friendships or other interests.

"He's in the Rhodesia Horse, isn't he?"

"Why, of course!" said Wally, staring at him with some surprise. "You don't mean to say you've forgotten!"

"No, no!" answered Olive, hastily, and half ashamed of his indifference. "And he's had a good time?"

"Splendacious! And he hopes to have a better. He's quite sure there's going to be a row there, and he means to be in the thick of it. Africa's the new Tom Tiddler's ground, and a sharp chap like Dick is sure to come in for some of the pickings. They'll make him a colonel in the new force, or he'll get hold of a diamond mine, or something of the kind, and he'll come back in a year or two, no end of a swell, and as rich as Croesus."

Olive listened still rather absently, little guessing how Wally's light chatter would cling to his mind like a burr, and bear fruit.

They went and had a cigar in the smoking-room, and several other men dropped in. It was the kind of party which Olive used to enjoy, and in which he used to shine; but this afternoon the incessant talk and the laughter jarred upon him, and, presently, muttering an excuse, he left the club.

He went into St. James's Park, and sauntered up and down one of the shady walks, and thought of Beryl. He longed for a sight of her face, thirsted for a word, one single word from her sweet lips. He felt that it would be impossible for him to remain much longer away from her; and yet he had been absent such a short time!

He remained in the park, sometimes sauntering about, sometimes sitting on one of the seats, until it was time to dress; then he got up with a sigh—remembering that he had promised the marquis to go to the Pattersons'—and walked towards home.

As he was leaving the broad walk, Godwin, the valet, came

along a side path. He was walking with downcast eyes, and did not appear to see Clive, until the latter said, with a nod:

"Ah, Godwin, taking a stroll?"

Godwin gave quite a little start, as if he had been lost in meditation, and raising his hat, murmured, in his low and respectful tone, "Yes, my lord."

Clive passed on, and Godwin also went on his way in the opposite direction; but, at a turn of the path, he stopped and looked round him with a sharp, keen glance. There was no one in sight but a nursery-maid or two and a sergeant of the Guards. Godwin, hidden behind some shrubs, watched Clive enter his house, and then went on his way.

Clive felt that he could not stand a dinner at the club, that he should be freer to think of Beryl in the quietude of his own rooms, and Parsons and the chef had concocted the kind of meal which their lord and master loved.

As Parsons was dressing Clive, he said: "Mr. Godwin has been here to-day, my lord. The marquis sent him to ask if we could put him up for a night or two; the painters are at work in a part of Doyne House, and Mr. Godwin is turned out of his room."

Clive nodded. "All right," he said. "I suppose we can put him up, Parsons?"

"Yes, my lord," replied Parsons. "He can have the back room at the top."

Clive nodded, and thought no more of it.

He ate his dinner in solitude, and always before his eyes was the Enchanted Valley; through the music of the band in the park floated Beryl's sweet voice; her lovely face hovered 'twixt him and the light which pierced in golden radiance the silken blind. He thought how happy he should be if she were sitting opposite to him; no, not opposite to him, but so near that he could touch her hand, or, better still, kiss the tendrils of her hair, which clustered so softly on her white brow.

After dinner he went on to the balcony, and smoked a pipe. He remembered, how, a few weeks ago, he had leant over the rail of that balcony and stared listlessly at the park and the people below. How ill, how weary he had been, how tired of life, and the pursuit of Folly! And now all was changed; life had a new meaning for him, his heart was full of love and hope, and life meant Beryl Frayne. He had almost forgotten the Pattersons, when he heard Parsons moving about softly in the room behind him, and lighting the lights. Then, with a sigh, he went in.

"Have I a card for the Pattersons' to-night, Parsons?" he asked.

"Yes, my lord," said Parsons. "Shall I order the brougham?"

"No," said Clive. "It's in Park Lane, isn't it? I'll walk."

He lingered for half an hour, then he set forth reluctantly.

The Pattersons were illustrious examples of the *nouveaux riches*. Mr. Patterson had made his money in African diamonds. Some said that he was worth three millions, some said four. He had literally started from nothing, and had arrived in Durban a few years ago, with only thirty shillings in his pocket, but an immense confidence in himself, which was worth any amount of capital. He had broken stones for the roads, painted houses, done odd jobs, worked, in fact, as he would never have worked in England; and at last had found his opportunity—and seized it. The result was untold wealth, a palace in Park Lane, a castle in Scotland, a villa in Florence, and that position in Society which is, nowadays, so readily accorded to the millionaire.

To put it shortly, Mr. and Mrs. Patterson possessed everything except an adequate supply of "H's." Royalty had stretched its august legs under their mahogany; the Pattersons' receptions were attended by the *crème de la crème* of what used to be—alas!—an exclusive aristocracy; for Mr. Sampson Patterson could not only give dinners worthy of a Lucullus, but, far more precious, could give tips respecting the movements of the Kaffir Ring on the Stock Exchange, which enabled his friends to make a little money for themselves.

Money is the great power nowadays. Rank, genius, bow down before it. Every one desires to shake hands with Midas, whose touch turns all things to gold. There is but one religion in these days of the *fin de siècle*, the worship of the Golden Calf.

Clive found a long string of carriages drawn up outside the Pattersons' new and palatial residence, and a small crowd had collected on either side of the scarlet awning, to see the brilliant guests arrive. As he passed over the thick Turkey carpet, which had been laid across the pavement, Clive felt sick at heart, and loathed the whole thing. Oh, to be a small farmer in the Enchanted Valley, with Beryl Frayne for wife!

A couple of footmen in gorgeous livery—the Pattersons were nothing if not gorgeous—took his hat and light overcoat, and he passed through a marble vestibule, up the broad stair-

case, to the magnificent reception-room. At the head of the stairs stood Mrs. Patterson, to receive her guests. She was a fat little woman with beady eyes, and a mass of false hair. She was fearfully *décolleté*, but was covered with diamonds, like a heathen idol; they sparkled on her fat arms, and scintillated from the bodice of her Parisian dress; there were diamonds even in the buckle of her high-heeled shoes.

She was very hot and very red; and her husband, standing just behind her with an immense red fan and a huge bouquet of flaring flowers, looked even hotter and redder.

Poor man! How he longed at that moment for a glass of beer and a long clay pipe!

As the footman bawled Olive's name, Mrs. Patterson's red face broadened with a smile of welcome and gratification, and even the male Patterson woke into life and interest. For Lord Olive Marle was a famous personage in his way, and, so to speak, more to be desired even than Royalty itself.

"Ow kind of my lord," she said, unctuously. "We 'eard that you were away. I'm afraid you'll find it very 'ot; there's such a crowd 'ere."

Mr. Patterson came forward with outstretched hands, huge and thick, and looking hot even through his white gloves.

"Very kind of you, my lord!" he said, in the thick voice which only a few years ago had been strained in yelling at the team of mules which he had driven from Natal to the interior. "It is 'ot, ain't it? Will you 'ave a drink? There's some champagne—Pommery, '89—in the buffay, just 'ere; I'm dyin' for a drink myself."

Olive bent over Mrs. Patterson's fat hand, murmured a refusal of her husband's hospitable offer, and slowly made his way through the crowd into the room.

It was a magnificent apartment, and huge enough for a king's ball-room. Mr. Patterson had "spread" himself upon it; he had given *carte blanche* to the most expensive builders and decorators, and the Pattersons' *salon* was the talk of the town.

Olive looked round him wearily and listlessly. He knew nearly everyone there. Men nodded with a little upraisal of their eyebrows at his altered appearance; and women, resplendent in evening-dress and gems, bowed and smiled as if they were ready to welcome the wanderer from their aristocratic fold.

With his crush hat under his arm, Olive moved along, speaking to one and another, and presently he came upon the marquis. As usual, Lord Doyme was seated next the young-

est and prettiest girl in the room. Young girls were always eager to attract his notice, and flattered by his attentions—for a *débutante* was never fully considered a success until the Marquis of Doyne had expressed his approval of her, and had, so to speak, set his seal upon her charms.

The marquis, with his arm round the settee against which the favoured girl leant, looked up at Clive with his charming smile.

"Ah, my dear Clive!" he murmured, "you are late."

Clive bowed, smiled, and passed on. Doyne, like everything else in the gorgeous place, jarred upon him. The heat seemed stifling, the noise, subdued though it was, distracting; he hated the brilliant crowd, the electric lights, the white and gold of the decorations.

He moved on until he had nearly reached the end of the room, and he came upon a small group clustering like so many bees round a beautiful woman seated in a low chair.

She was lying back, with her face upturned, her eyes half closed, her hand moving slowly. She was very dark, with long lashes which half concealed eyes almost Spanish in hue and form. A regal, indolent air distinguished her, and set her, as it were, high above even the most beautiful of her sisters. She seemed to be scarcely listening to the man who was talking to her, and the smile which slightly curved her well-shaped lips was full of that indolent confidence in her own charms which is the birthright of a very beautiful woman.

As Clive approached, she raised her lids and looked at him. A serene and placid glance enough, but the under lip quivered slightly, and the fan of ostrich feathers moved a trifle more quickly, as Clive stood before her, and waited for the outstretching of her perfectly-gloved hand.

It was Lady Blanche Westley, the woman whom he was expected to marry.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE man who was seated beside her, and had been striving his utmost to amuse her, nodded to Clive, and rose at once, as if Clive had a prescriptive right to the seat.

The latter sat down, and, leaning back, was silent for quite a minute. He was never embarrassed, at any rate, outwardly, and the cool self-possession which distinguished all the Marles, and himself in particular, never failed in its due effect upon the other sex. Women have a secret contempt for the man who blushes and stammers, or rushes into meaningless drivel

to hide his obvious nervousness. Olive could stand or sit as silent and impassive as the sphinx, while the woman at his side wondered what he was thinking of, and asked herself whether he was ever going to speak.

Lady Blanche was accustomed to this peculiarity of his, and leant back and waited, and never dreamt of speaking first.

"Why haven't you gone out of town?" he asked, at last.

This didn't sound particularly polite, but Lady Blanche did not resent it.

"I am staying for Lady Dorchester's last dance," she said; "it is to be a big political affair, and she wants me to help her; she is rather fagged by the long season."

"You are not looking fagged," he returned, glancing at the handsome face with its lustrous eyes. She looked the personification of health and strength.

"I am rarely tired, and never fagged, as you know," she said. "I am very strong. Why have you come back?"

He told her the truth at once.

"Fleming wants to see me."

"Have you had a good time?" she asked. "You are looking very well." Her eyes wandered round the room as she spoke, and the tone was only just that of friendly interest.

"A very good time," he replied. "I have been 'resting,' as the mummimers say. It is the first time in my life I have done such a thing, and it seems to have answered. I am going back as soon as I can."

Her dark lashes swept her cheek for an instant, then she looked across the room, and smiled indolently at some one who had bowed to her.

"Why didn't you let Fleming come to you?" she asked.

Clive did not move a muscle.

"Fleming would have effectually destroyed any chance of rest," he said. "It is the old story—raising the wind. According to Fleming, we're in the last throes of penury. Where do you go when you leave town?"

"To Glengowrie," she answered. Glengowrie was the name of the vast estate which she held in Scotland. "Lady Dorchester is coming down to keep house for me. There will be rather a large party; not too large, of course. They tell me that the birds are very plentiful and strong this year. I hope you will find the report correct."

Olive looked aside. His heart smote him. Ever since he had been able to hold a gun he had spent a fortnight from the Twelfth at Glengowrie. He knew that she expected him to

It is his only chance of salvation in every way, and he *shall* not cast it aside. Forgive me and be patient, Blanche!"

"I can forgive you, though I could forgive no one else for speaking so plainly," she murmured in a low voice. "And I will wait—I will be patient, as you put it"—her lips curved with self-scorn—"for just a fortnight—Lord Clarence's fortnight."

Lord Doyme touched her hand pleadingly, gratefully.

"Long before that," he said in a low voice, which quivered with emotion, "Clive shall be at your feet, praying for that which he now seems—only seems, Blanche—to value so lightly."

"We shall see," she replied, with outward calm. "Will you take me to Lady Dorchester?"

Clive saw them passing down the staircase, and hastened to join them, and put the ladies in their carriage. Lady Dorchester was gracious to him, for, like most women, she was fond of Clive, and lenient with him; but Lady Blanche scarcely glanced at him, and when he raised his hat and said good-night, she was too busy with her wraps to give him her hand.

The marquis and Clive stood bareheaded as the carriage drove away. Most men in Lord Doyme's place would have shown their anger and resentment; but he was far too astute to do so. He linked his arm in his nephew's, and said, in his pleasantest way:

"Come down to the Outcasts', Clive; there is some kind of a function on there to-night, and we are sure to be amused. Give me a cigarette, dear boy."

Clive would have preferred to have wandered about the squares and thought of Beryl, but he could not refuse his uncle's invitation, and they went to the club.

At an early hour the next morning, Clive sat in his own room, staring before him, and "facing the music." He was virtually, if not actually, engaged to Blanche. If he remained in town he must see her every day, must carry on the falsehood. If he were only married to Beryl, if the irrevocable step were taken! He could not go on living this life much longer. He went to bed at last, and dreamt of Beryl and the Enchanted Valley.

On his way to the breakfast-room next morning, he met Godwin. The man bowed, and stood against the wall to let him pass.

"Ah, Godwin," said Clive in his pleasantest way. "I hope you are comfortable?"

"Yes, thank you, my lord," answered Godwin in his low voice. "It is very kind of your lordship to let me stay here."

"Not at all," said Clive. "Stay as long as you like."

After breakfast, he rode in the park for the lack of something better to do. Half-way down the Row he met Patsy Pryde. She was mounted on a bay mare which he had not yet paid for, and she looked exquisitely graceful and girlish, with her fair hair ruffled by the light breeze, and her face all smiles. She turned one of these smiles full on Clive, and he raised his hat and bowed and smiled and thought, with a world of bitterness, what a fool he had been! He lunched at his club, and, on returning home, found a note from the marquis, saying that Fleming could not come to London for two or three days. Clive flung the note from him with something like an oath, and caught up his hat and went out.

Two or three days! It might be a week. And Beryl was waiting for him! He dared not write to her, for if he did so he must give his address, and the address might lead to the discovery of his identity. Chafing and fuming, he found himself on the Embankment. There, at any rate, he should not meet any one he knew, and should be free to think of her. He reached the Albert Bridge, and, for a time, leant over the rail, looking at the river, and thinking of the stream that ran through Trentishoe, and his sweet girl-love, who had so often stood beside it with him.

With a sigh, he turned away, and was crossing the bridge aimlessly, when he saw something which made him stop dead short, and sent the blood with a rush to his face.

At the far end of the bridge a young girl was leaning on the rail, looking at the river, as he himself had been looking a moment or two before. Her face was turned from him, but the figure, the very dress, was so like Beryl's that he thought he must be dreaming, and that his thinking of her had evoked her presence. He stood still for a moment, then he walked on quickly.

At the sound of his footsteps the girl turned her head. Clive's heart leapt. Surely it was Beryl!

He strode up to her, and, with a start, she shrank back, then leant towards him, with her hand pressed on her heart, and her lovely face for one moment red, and then deathly white.

"Good God! Beryl!" he exclaimed; and, without knowing it, he had got both her hands in his, and was looking down into her face, with joy and surprise fighting for mastery.

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After breakfast, he rode in the park for the lack of something better to do. Half-way down the Row he met Patsy Pryde. She was mounted on a bay mare which he had not yet paid for, and she looked exquisitely graceful and girlish, with her fair hair ruffled by the light breeze, and her face all smiles. She turned one of these smiles full on Clive, and he raised his hat and bowed and smiled and thought, with a world of bitterness, what a fool he had been! He lunched at his club, and, on returning home, found a note from the marquis, saying that Fleming could not come to London for two or three days. Clive flung the note from him with something like an oath, and caught up his hat and went out.

Two or three days! It might be a week. And Beryl was waiting for him! He dared not write to her, for if he did so he must give his address, and the address might lead to the discovery of his identity. Chafing and fuming, he found himself on the Embankment. There, at any rate, he should not meet any one he knew, and should be free to think of her. He reached the Albert Bridge, and, for a time, leant over the rail, looking at the river, and thinking of the stream that ran through Trentishoe, and his sweet girl-love, who had so often stood beside it with him.

With a sigh, he turned away, and was crossing the bridge aimlessly, when he saw something which made him stop dead short, and sent the blood with a rush to his face.

At the far end of the bridge a young girl was leaning on the rail, looking at the river, as he himself had been looking a moment or two before. Her face was turned from him, but the figure, the very dress, was so like Beryl's that he thought he must be dreaming, and that his thinking of her had evoked her presence. He stood still for a moment, then he walked on quickly.

At the sound of his footsteps the girl turned her head. Olive's heart leapt. Surely it was Beryl!

He strode up to her, and, with a start, she shrank back, then leant towards him, with her hand pressed on her heart, and her lovely face for one moment red, and then deathly white.

"Good God! Beryl!" he exclaimed; and, without knowing it, he had got both her hands in his, and was looking down into her face, with joy and surprise fighting for mastery.

It is his only chance of salvation in every way, and he *shall* not cast it aside. Forgive me and be patient, Blanche!"

"I can forgive you, though I could forgive no one else for speaking so plainly," she murmured in a low voice. "And I will wait—I will be patient, as you put it"—her lips curved with self-scorn—"for just a fortnight—Lord Clarence's fortnight."

Lord Doyme touched her hand pleadingly, gratefully.

"Long before that," he said in a low voice, which quivered with emotion, "Clive shall be at your feet, praying for that which he now seems—only seems, Blanche—to value so lightly."

"We shall see," she replied, with outward calm. "Will you take me to Lady Dorchester?"

Clive saw them passing down the staircase, and hastened to join them, and put the ladies in their carriage. Lady Dorchester was gracious to him, for, like most women, she was fond of Clive, and lenient with him; but Lady Blanche scarcely glanced at him, and when he raised his hat and said good-night, she was too busy with her wraps to give him her hand.

The marquis and Clive stood bareheaded as the carriage drove away. Most men in Lord Doyme's place would have shown their anger and resentment; but he was far too astute to do so. He linked his arm in his nephew's, and said, in his pleasantest way:

"Come down to the Outcasts', Clive; there is some kind of a function on there to-night, and we are sure to be amused. Give me a cigarette, dear boy."

Clive would have preferred to have wandered about the squares and thought of Beryl, but he could not refuse his uncle's invitation, and they went to the club.

At an early hour the next morning, Clive sat in his own room, staring before him, and "facing the music." He was virtually, if not actually, engaged to Blanche. If he remained in town he must see her every day, must carry on the falsehood. If he were only married to Beryl, if the irrevocable step were taken! He could not go on living this life much longer. He went to bed at last, and dreamt of Beryl and the Enchanted Valley.

On his way to the breakfast-room next morning, he met Godwin. The man bowed, and stood against the wall to let him pass.

"Ah, Godwin," said Clive in his pleasantest way. "I hope you are comfortable?"

"Yes, thank you, my lord," answered Godwin in his low voice. "It is very kind of your lordship to let me stay here."

"Not at all," said Clive. "Stay as long as you like."

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"Good God! Beryl!" he exclaimed; and, without knowing it, he had got both her hands in his, and was looking down into her face, with joy and surprise fighting for mastery.

"Clive!" she breathed, 'twixt tears and smiles. And now, that she spoke, he knew that it was indeed Beryl.

"Beryl! Is it really you? Is it?"

"Yes, it is I, Clive," she said. The colour came and went in her face, and her voice quivered like an Æolian harp, and her eyes shone through glittering tears. "Oh, how wonderful, how wonderful, to meet you here! I was thinking of you as I looked at the water. I was wondering whether you were anywhere near!"

He still stared at her with amazement and an incredulous joy.

"I can't believe it!" he exclaimed. "How is it possible that you can be here! I was thinking of you only a moment ago, and now here you stand before me. Or is it only your wraith!"

"It is I myself, Clive," she said, laughing softly, as her fingers clung round his hand.

He looked round in a confused and bewildered fashion.

"Where is your father?" he asked, as if he expected to see Mr. Frayne close beside them.

"At home—at Trentishoe," replied Beryl.

"And you have come up to London—alone?" he asked.

She nodded, smiling softly.

"But why—why?" he demanded.

"I want to tell you," she said, with a little catch in her voice, "but my heart is beating so that I can scarcely speak. I feel giddy and confused. Oh, Clive, is it really you?"

"It's really me," he assured her, with a smile. "But is it really you, or have you risen, like Venus, from the river below there, and will you vanish presently like a vision?"

He looked round, then drew her arm within his.

"Let us go to some place where we can sit down and talk, for Heaven's sake!" he said, passing his hand across his brow. The light touch of her hand, the upward glance of her beautiful eyes, thrilled through him. In silence, he led her into Battersea Park close by, and in one of the shaded walks he found a seat.

"Now, my dearest," he said. "Tell me! Quickly!"

She leant back, his hand holding hers under the screen of her light cloak, and looked up at him with a tender content.

"It is soon told," she began. "The morning after you left, there came a letter from the manager of the Coronet Theatre—do you know it, Clive?"

"Yes, dearest. Go on!"

ever so long ago, and we had thought that nothing would come of it. But the manager wrote, saying that he thought he could produce the opera, but that he wanted to see father. He said that he thought—the soprano part too difficult. Father was very excited about it, of course. We talked about it for hours, and something father said impressed, haunted me. He said, 'You have sung that part over and over again, Beryl. If he could only hear you, he would see how much easier it is than he thinks, and he would take the opera. It would make me famous.' This haunted me all the night, and I longed to come to London and see the manager; but I knew father would not let me. He does not like me to leave Trentishoe, you know."

Olive nodded.

"Well? Go on, dearest!"

"So I made up my mind to come without telling him. I went round to Mrs. Saunders, and arranged for her to look after father while I was away—it would only be for a few days—and I wrote a letter, telling him what I was going to do; she could read it to him. And the next morning I started before he was awake."

"Beryl!" he exclaimed, under his breath.

"Was it wrong?" she asked, with a pleading glance at him. "Ah, if you knew how his heart is set on this opera!"

"No, no; not wrong. It was just like you, dearest. Go on!"

"I saw the manager this morning," she said. "He was very kind and considerate. I sang the part to him; and I thought that I had done all that was necessary and could go back, but he wants me to sing it to the company, and I must stay another day or two."

Olive's heart was beating fast, his brain was in a whirl; he could scarcely realise that his girl-love was sitting close beside him, with her hand in his, her sweet face upturned to his, with all her love glowing in her eyes.

"Where are you staying?" he asked.

"At a private hotel, a boarding-house," she replied. "It is in Flower Street, quite near here; father used to stay there."

Olive looked down at her fondly, anxiously.

"Alone in London! My dearest!"

"Why, what does it matter?" she said, with wide-open eyes. "And I am not alone now that I have found you, Olive."

"No, no," he assented, as he pressed her to him.

"Do you live near here?" she asked.

"Yes; not very far off."

She looked at him thoughtfully, with a tender, lingering smile.

"How strange!" she murmured. "To be near where you live."

A clock struck.

"I must go," she cried. "I have to be at the theatre in a quarter of an hour. How quickly the time has passed!"

"I will come with you," said Clive, eagerly. If the truth must be told, he was still confused and bewildered by her unexpected presence.

They rose and left the park. As they did so, Godwin stole out from behind the shrubs and looked after them. There was a demure smile of satisfaction on his eminently-respectable face, and he walked away with the air of a man who had done a good day's work.

CHAPTER XVII.

CLIVE waited outside the Coronet Theatre, keeping just within sight of the stage-door, and pacing up and down.

He was terribly excited, and still a little bewildered. That Beryl, *his* Beryl, should be here in London, within reach of his hand, seemed too marvellous to be true. His heart was throbbing with love, the blood running riot in his veins; and he could still feel the touch of her soft, warm hand on his arm.

She seemed to have been gone hours; but presently she came out from the dingy door-way, looking strangely pure and white in contrast with her surroundings.

Clive hastened to her side. Her beautiful face was flushed, and there was rather a troubled expression in the violet eyes.

"What has happened, dearest?" he enquired.

The flush deepened.

"Nothing very much," she replied, as they walked on, "but I'm afraid I cannot get back to Trentishoe to-morrow; and, indeed, for some days. The manager was very kind—he is always kind in a funny way," she looked a little puzzled. "He is quite different from any one else I have met; so are they all."

"How do you mean?" asked Clive, suspiciously.

She turned her innocent eyes upon him with the frank simplicity of a child.

"Oh, I scarcely know how to describe their manner. It is as if they had known me for years."

"Confound their impudence!" he muttered under his breath.

"There was one of the principal actors; I don't even know his name; but he acted and spoke as if we were quite old friends."

Olive muttered something worse than "Confound."

"They only mean to be kind," said Beryl. "They know that I am strange to London, and alone—What is the matter, Olive?"

"Nothing, nothing, dearest; go on!" he replied, inwardly chafing.

"I sang the part—I was terribly nervous; I'm sure I don't know why. I suppose it was because they were all so clever and watched me so intently. But the lady, the leading lady, said she could not manage it. She was so kind as to say that my register was larger than hers, and the manager asked me if I could alter the music in one or two parts. I said I could, but that it would take two or three days, and I would send it up from Trentishoe; but he said that would not do; and that he would prefer that I should come and try it over with the full band. What am I to do? If I were to go back and leave matters as they stand, and to chance, the opera might not be played. I've heard how difficult it is to get a piece accepted. And father would be so disappointed! Had I not better remain until the thing is settled? I will do just as you wish, dearest."

Olive gnawed his moustache. He hated the whole business. The thought that his pure, dainty girl-love should be subjected to the polite familiarity of the manager of the Coronet and his company, made him mad. But how could he interfere and send her home with her mission only half accomplished?

"I'm afraid you must stay," he said, at last, grudgingly. "God knows I love to have you near me! The thought that you are here, in London, that I can see you—! But I don't like your going to that beastly theatre, and amongst those actor people; they are not—not nice; not fit to associate with you."

She opened her eyes with faint surprise.

"Yes; you must stay, I suppose. It will only be for a few days. And perhaps I can get away at the same time, and go down with you!"

She uttered a joyous little cry. "And—and perhaps we can meet every day while I'm here, Olive?" she said, shyly.

He pressed her arm. "That we certainly will, dearest. And now we will go and get something to eat."

"Oh, may we? The manager asked me to go and have some lunch with him." Olive ground his teeth. "But I said I had a friend waiting for me; and he—he smiled in such a peculiar way that—that I think he must have guessed."

She blushed and smiled up at him, and Olive tried to smile in response; but he was fuming. The manager asked her to have some lunch, did he? Confound him!

They went to a quiet restaurant, and Olive ordered the daintiest things he could get, and watched her as she sat opposite him, her face glowing with happiness. He himself ate very little. Strange thoughts, ideas, were running through his head. If only she were his wife, his very own, so tightly bound to him that nothing and no one could come between them! His own! His breath came fast, and he frowned unconsciously.

"What are you thinking of?" she asked, putting her hand in his with sweet timidity.

"I can't tell you," he said, with a deep note in his voice. "Perhaps I will to-morrow."

She looked at him with innocent curiosity.

"To-morrow? I shall see you to-morrow?"

"Yes; we will meet in the park, where we sat to-day, at twelve o'clock. Will you come, dearest?"

"Yes, I will come," she answered, simply. "And you will tell me then?"

He nodded. "I will tell you then," he said, almost solemnly.

They left the restaurant, and Olive took her through some of the quiet streets—he dared not risk the fashionable thoroughfares, lest they should be seen—and they talked in undertones, and were happy. She remained with him until the last possible moment, and he parted from her at the corner of Flower Street, and just out of sight of the windows of the boarding-house. He watched her until she disappeared, then strode homewards; but, after he had passed the club, he paused, went back, and entered it.

Lord Wally was stretched out in an arm-chair, and nodded sleepily.

"Hallo, Marle; you look as if you'd been made a Cabinet Minister, and as solemn as an owl."

Olive smiled, and sank into a chair beside the lad.

"I've been thinking of Lestrangle," he said, as carelessly

and casually as he could. "How did he manage to get married, Wally?"

The boy grinned. "Oh, it ain't difficult," he replied. "It's very often done, you know; you only want a parson and a ring, don't you know?"

"You publish banns, or whatever it is, don't you?" said Olive, with a well-simulated yawn.

"Oh, yes; that's the regular way of doing it," assented Wally; "but that was too slow and too public for Lestrangle. He got a special licence."

"How did he get that?" asked Olive, "and what the devil do you know about it?"

"I happen to know because he told me," said Wally; "and, look here, I know a deuced sight more than you think, old chap!"

"You could easily do that. But Lestrangle?"

"Oh, he went down to a place called Doctors' Commons; took an affidavit, or something of the kind—swore he'd had the measles, and the whooping-cough, and was in his right mind; that sort of thing, you know—and paid the proper amount of oof; and there you are!"

"Sounds easy."

"Yes, a deuced sight too easy!" responded Wally, solemnly. "It's far easier to get married than to keep off it. There ought to be an act passed preventing any chap getting spliced until he's been engaged, say, three years. There wouldn't be so many poor devils sacrificed. Give 'em time to think and recover their senses."

Olive nodded and laughed.

"You're getting too clever, Wally," he said, as he got up and sauntered out.

Was it so easy as this? His heart beat fast and furiously. If Beryl were only his! This thought haunted him all through the evening, and through most part of the night; and the next morning, soon after breakfast, he called for his hat, and went out with an air of determination which attracted the attention not only of Parsons, but also of Godwin, who stood beside his fellow-valet, and watched the stalwart figure as it strode towards the cab-stand.

"Your governor looks as if he meant business this morning, Parsons," said Godwin. "Where's he off to now?"

Parsons shook his head. "I don't know," he answered, thoughtfully. "I can't quite make his lordship out. He's been quite different since he came back. Cab's gone city-wards. Now, what can he have to do there?"

"Gone to raise the wind?" suggested Godwin, as he moved to the door.

Parsons smiled in a superior way. "We don't go to the City when we want money; you know that well enough, Mr. Godwin."

Godwin laughed and nodded, and left the house. Clive's cab was still in sight, and Godwin jumped into a hansom and followed him.

As the clock struck twelve, Beryl walked towards the place of meeting, the seat in front of the shrubbery. She had been hard at work the night before, and through the morning, and was a little pale, but her eyes glowed with expectancy, and the blood rushed to her face as Clive came striding towards her. He held her hand for a moment or two without a word, but the pressure of his strong fingers was eloquent enough, even if his eyes had not spoken.

"I have kept you waiting, dearest!" he said. "I have been detained on—on business." His eyes fell for a moment.

"Oh, it has only been for a minute or two, and I didn't mind," she replied. "I was glad to rest. Was it important business, Clive?"

"Very," he returned, seating himself beside her, and drawing her arm through his, for all the world like one of the working-men sweethearts who had often sat there before him—"very. I am going to tell you about it, Beryl."

"Are you?" she said, with a pleased and grateful glance at him. "I shall love to hear about anything concerning you, Clive."

"And this concerns you, too," he answered. He pressed her arm against his side, and she nestled a little closer.

"How strange—but how nice—that sounds!" she whispered. "But everything that concerns you concerns me, doesn't it? Has it anything to do with what you promised to tell me to-day?"

"Yes; it has," he replied. His voice and his eyes were so serious that she looked at him with faint surprise.

"Is it bad news you are going to tell me, dear?" he asked. "If so, don't be afraid. I can bear it; I can bear anything while—while you love me. Oh, Clive, you must not!" for, with a hasty glance round him, he had bent and kissed the sweet lips. Only a policeman saw him, and he concealed a smile in his beard, and considerately looked the other way.

Clive looked down at her blushing face and downcast eyes anxiously.

"Beryl, I shall startle you; I shall make you angry, per-

haps; but I can't help it, I must risk it. Dearest, I want to ask you a question. Will you marry me?"

The blush came back to her face before it had scarcely left it.

"Why, you know I will," she whispered.

"Yes; some time, in the future, you mean," he said; "but I mean now, at once."

She started, and her face went pale, and she looked at him with widely open eyes, and, in her astonishment, she even made an effort to withdraw her arm; but he held it firmly.

"I have frightened, startled you, dearest. I knew I should," he affirmed, gravely.

"I—I am not frightened; at least, I think not," she said in a low voice. "But I—I don't understand. Why should you want to—to marry me now, so soon?"

"I'll tell you, dearest—the truth—" He bit his lip; he meant half the truth. "I can't go on living without you, Beryl."

"But—but you have me—I am your promised wife," she faltered, lifting her eyes to his bravely, and with a shy tenderness in them which made him long to kiss her again.

"That's not enough—that's in the future, and the future is full of risks and chances, dearest," he declared. "All sorts of things might happen to part us."

"To part us?" she echoed, faintly.

"Yes. And I can't run the risk. You are more to me than life itself."

"Ah, Olive, Olive!"

"And I want to feel that you are bound to me, that you are my very own, my wife! Now, see here, dearest; there is no use, no good, in waiting any longer. We may as well be married now as a year hence. Why should we wait?"

She was silent a moment; then, with downcast eyes, she whispered:

"You want us to be married directly we get back to Trentishoe, Olive?"

"No," he said in a low voice; "I want you to marry me now, here, in London."

She turned her eyes upon him with a startled expression.

"Now, and in London! But father is not here? How can we?"

"I don't want your father to know anything about it yet," he said. "I do not want any one to know. We must be married secretly, Beryl."

She was very pale, and her brows were drawn straight as she looked before her in silence.

"Why, Olive?" she asked, at last.

Olive hesitated a moment.

"There are reasons," he replied. "I am not so independent as—well, I have led you to believe. I am dependent, in a large measure, upon a relative, who—would—"

"Would not forgive you for marrying me?" she finished for him, and with a tightening of her lips.

"That is the truth," he said. "He is an old man, and self-willed; he has always had his own way—"

"And he wants you to marry some one else?" she hazarded. As she spoke, she tried to free her arm and draw away from him, but Olive still held her tightly.

"Yes," he said, frowning; "you have guessed it, dearest. For God's sake, don't look so grieved and unhappy. I have never loved any woman but you, can never love any one but you. Believe me, Beryl. Look at me, my dearest!"

She raised her eyes, dim with trouble, then her lips moved as she scanned his face.

"I believe you, Olive," she panted. "But why should you want to marry me now?"

"Because if I do not, I must go away; leave England," he said, quietly. "And I can't bear to part with you."

"Leave England. Ah, Olive!" It was she who clung to him now, and her bosom heaved with terror and dismay at the thought of losing him.

"Yes. If you say 'no,' if you think it is not right to marry me secretly, I shall go to my uncle, and tell him of our engagement. He will cut me off with less than the proverbial shilling, and I shall go to Africa, and try and make some money, enough to enable me to marry you."

He could feel her trembling.

"And—and if I say 'yes'?" she faltered.

"Then I shall go on just as I have done. I shall keep the marriage from my uncle, and wait until— Well, dearest, Fate will help us. Something will turn up— Anyway, I can't go on any longer like this. I *must* have you for my very own, my wife. Why, I've suffered agonies at the thought that you were mixed up with these theatrical people—that I hadn't the right to stand openly by your side, to take all this business off your hands, and that even if I have the right, as your promised husband, I can't dare to be seen with you."

She passed her hand across her brow.

"May not my father know?" she pleaded.

"Dearest, don't you see that if he knew I was dependent upon my uncle, who would be opposed to our marriage, your father would not consent?"

"Ah, yes; I see! No, he would not," she said, with a long breath. "Oh, what shall I say—do—Clive?"

The expression of tender entreaty in her eyes and voice intensified his love, his passionate desire to make her his. He could scarcely refrain from taking her in his arms and kissing the parted, quivering lips so near his own.

"Do as I ask, dearest!" he replied, hoarsely. "There are only two courses open to us. Either you must marry me now, at once, and we must keep our secret, or I must tell my uncle of our engagement and go abroad to make some money. Other fellows have done it, and what they have done I can do."

"What could you do?" she whispered, anxiously.

"I should join the Rhodesia Horse," he said. "A man I know is in it."

Her eyes dilated with terror.

"I know! I have read about it. Oh, Clive, Clive, there is danger—risk! You might be—!" She shuddered, and her hand tightened on his arm.

"No, no!" he said, filled with remorse and pain by the sight of her distress, "there's not much risk."

"Clive, I have read about the—the murders and the fighting; the poor young Englishmen who have fallen. Oh, no, no! I could not bear it—I could not bear it!"

"There is no danger—or very little," he was constrained to add; but she refused to be reassured, and he saw the tears gathering in the violet eyes, and felt her throbbing with the dread of the parting, and his danger.

"What a selfish, thoughtless brute I am to have told you!" he said, remorsefully. "I ought to have gone away and written—"

"Ah, you would not do that!" she exclaimed, quickly, breathlessly, as if he had stabbed her. "You would not be so cruel, Clive!"

There was silence for a moment, as she put up her hand to her eyes; then he said in a low voice: "Decide, Beryl! Don't think of the African business; try and forget that I told you. I'd go somewhere else, do anything else, if I had to; but it seems the only thing open to me. See here, dearest; why should you hesitate, why should you not do as I wish? If you will say 'yes,' we can be married to-morrow."

She looked up at him, startled and bewildered.

"To-morrow!"

"Yes. I have made all the arrangements, have got everything prepared."

"You have thought of it all! You knew that I should say 'yes'?" she faltered.

He hung his head for a moment.

"Yes," he assented. "I felt that you would. Listen, Beryl! I have got a special licence—you do not know what that is? Well, it is a kind of permit which allows us to be married at any time. I got it this morning. I will meet you to-morrow at three o'clock. I can come for you to Flower Street—or, better still, I will meet you here. We will drive straight to a little church—it is St. Peter's, in Grove Street, not very far from your boarding-house—we can be married there, then run down to one of the quiet watering-places."

She was trembling so violently that he stopped to give her time.

"Are you frightened, dearest?" he whispered.

She raised her eyes slowly, and tried to smile.

"No," she said, at last; "not frightened, but—oh, Olive, it is all so sudden, so—"

"Why should you be so distressed, dearest?" he asked, tenderly. "We can be back in London next morning; you can finish this opera business, and we will go down to Trentishoe together—man and wife! Think of it, dearest! Man and wife! My very own. Nothing can part us then, nothing; wait!" for her lips had parted as if she were about to speak. "You shall decide. I will not press you, drive you, Beryl. God knows how proud I would be to marry you before all the world, and in the face of everything. By Heaven, I *will* do it!" he broke off, passionately.

She put out her other hand and touched him.

"No, no! You shall not run any risk—shall not suffer for your love for me, Olive," she breathed, her eyes dwelling on his with ineffable love and tenderness, with the full surrender of the woman's will to the man's. "I—I will marry you as—as you wish! I can't do otherwise; I *must* do as you want me—for I love you, Olive, and my love has made you my lord and master!"

He was awed by the expression in her eyes, by the tender solemnity of her voice, and for a moment he could not speak, could only look at her, his face almost as white as hers. Then he said, hoarsely:

"God bless you, Beryl; and may He punish me if I ever give you cause to regret it!"

CHAPTER XVIII.

PATSY PRYDE had rooms in the neighbourhood of Sloane Square. It is a pleasant locality, and extremely convenient for ladies of Patsy Pryde's profession, because they can reach it by the theatre train, or drive straight home from their work in the neat little brougham, which often looks far more innocent than its mistress.

On this night, Patsy Pryde, breaking a supper engagement to which she had been looking forward rather keenly, drove home immediately after her turn at the Empress, for a note had been brought to her dressing-room, a note bearing the elaborate Doyne crest, requesting her, in the marquis's courtly phraseology, to permit him to call upon her at twelve. It was rather a late hour for the reception of visitors, but Patsy Pryde and etiquette, to say nothing of conventionality, were comparative strangers.

A few minutes after midnight, the marquis's brougham set him down at her house, and he alighted, assisted by Godwin.

"Wait here," he said, entering the tiny, over-decorated passage, which the landlady had called the "'all,'" and he himself went upstairs.

Patsy had just flung her light opera-cloak from her gleaming shoulders, and was lying back in a rocking-chair, with a bottle of champagne and some cigarettes close to her elbow; and she held out her hand and greeted Doyne with a smile, but no surprise; for it takes a great deal to surprise a Patsy Pryde.

"I must apologise, my dear Patsy," he began, in his suave manner; but she saw the anxiety behind it, and she waved the apology aside.

"What's up, marquis?" she said. "I can see something's gone wrong."

"Something will go very wrong, decidedly wrong," he replied, "unless we can prevent it."

"It's about Olive?" she asked.

He nodded. "Yes; the girl's in London. He has met her."

She raised herself, and the colour came into her face suddenly.

"She must be a cool hand to follow him so soon," she remarked, with a curl of her child-like lips.

"No; it is a coincidence. an accident," he said.

She smiled incredulously.

"I know that kind of accident; it comes from Sheffield! Anyway, she's here!"

"Yes; and that is not the worst of it. The fool is mad, utterly mad. He—he means to marry her!"

Her eyes grew hard, and she caught her breath.

"I told you so long ago," she said. "But how do you know?"

"Godwin," he replied. He had no need to say more.

She nodded. "You put him on the scent? He's a sharp chap, Godwin; ought to have been a detective. So he shadowed him? What did he find out?"

The marquis stood by the table, softly drumming on it with his lavender-gloved hand.

"Everything," he replied. "If I had not heard it from Godwin himself, I could not believe it. He must be as mad as a March hare!"

"Tell me everything," she said. "Don't leave anything out."

Doyne sank into a chair.

"I've brought Godwin with me," he said, quietly.

She raised her brows approvingly. "That was right. Let him come up. I want to hear it from him—just all he knows. Will you ring the bell?"

The marquis rang the bell, and Godwin came up with his quiet step, and stood with folded hands and impassive face.

"Tell Miss Pryde just what you told me this afternoon, Godwin," ordered his lordship.

"Here! Open this first," said Patsy, signing to the champagne. Godwin opened the bottle deftly, filled the glasses, and handed them with the cigarettes, as if he were nothing more than an ordinary footman. Patsy Pryde took a long drink, and got her cigarette alight. Then nodded.

The man made his report. If Olive could have heard the cold-blooded recitals of his interviews with Beryl, what would he have done to the narrator? Mr. Godwin would have suffered pretty considerably! The marquis sat with his hat shading his face, his brows drawn, his lips tightly compressed; but Patsy Pryde made no attempt to conceal her countenance, and there was an expression on it which deeply impressed and interested Mr. Godwin as he smoothly and impassively told his tale.

When he came to Olive's proposal of a secret and immediate marriage, and the arrangements which he had made for its

performance, Patsy Pryde uttered a sharp exclamation and sat up, staring at the man's mask-like face.

"To-morrow!" she exclaimed. "You're sure it's to-morrow?"

"Quite sure, miss," replied Godwin, respectfully, but firmly. "I heard every word distinctly; indeed, I was almost afraid his lordship or the young lady would hear me breathing, I was so close behind them."

"It's well for you he didn't!" said Patsy, grimly. "To-morrow! And he's got the licence?"

"Yes, miss. His lordship went down to the place in the morning, as I've said."

There was a moment or two of silence. Patsy stared straight before her; the hand that screened Doyne's face did not move; Godwin stood like a carved image, or a machine that had suddenly stopped its appointed work.

"He's certainly goin' to marry her!" observed Patsy, at last, and as if speaking to herself. "To marry a mere nobody, a girl from the country; him, who'll be the Marquis of Doyne; him, who could marry almost anybody, the very best of them, and *was* going to marry Lady—"

The marquis glanced at her warningly.

"Leave other persons out of this business," he said, almost sternly. "What is to be done?"

She laughed angrily.

"Offer to go to the church and give the girl away," she answered, mockingly. "What *can* you do?"

He raised his brows despairingly. "Nothing that I can think of. I only came to you because I promised to do so, because—"

"You thought that perhaps the mouse might be able to help the lion," she broke in, "and the mouse would if she could see her way; but she can't. You can't have Lord Clive seized for debt, or pretend he's mad, and lock him up. All that sort of thing's well enough in a story book, or in an Adelphi play, but it doesn't wash in real life, does it?"

Doyne shook his head.

"There is nothing to be done, I'm afraid," he said, calmly, but with a twitch of his lips. "He must perpetrate this act of madness, and take the consequences. What they are he knows well enough. I have done with him!"

He rose, but she signed to him to resume his seat. There was a hard glitter in her blue eyes, and her lips were set tightly.

"Wait a minute!" she said in a harsh voice. "Here's a

couple of simple fools—people in love are always fools—on one side, and three clever people on the other. It's a strange thing if the three can't be a match for the two!"

The marquis shrugged his shoulders.

"When a horse takes the bit between his teeth, it's hard to stop him, Patsy."

"Oh, I don't know. There's ways. And there's a way of putting a spoke in this young woman's wheel, if we could only hit upon it."

"You may go, Godwin," said his master.

"No; let him wait," she said. "Godwin's got his wits about him, though he does pretend to look like a wooden image."

Godwin received the compliment without moving a muscle.

"Can't you think of anything, Godwin?" she asked.

"You needn't be afraid to speak."

"I'm not afraid, miss," he said, respectfully. "It's my duty to serve his lordship, the marquis—and Lord Marle, 'Mr. Marle,' as the young lady calls him."

Patsy looked up sharply.

"She doesn't know who he is—his title?"

"No, miss. Nor where he lives. She knows nothing."

Patsy thought, her white forehead furrowed, her small, even teeth closed on her cigarette.

"That's strange," she muttered. "Lor', if it wasn't for the licence, I should say he didn't mean marryin' her at all!"

Godwin raised his eyes for an instant.

"If you could get the young lady to believe that," he said in a very low voice.

Patsy looked at him sharply, then fell to musing again. The marquis sat in a brown study, so profound and grim that when she suddenly started to her feet and extended her hand, he actually started.

"By George, it might be done!" she exclaimed, more to herself than the others.

Both men looked at her intently, expectantly.

"What?" asked Doyne.

She held up her hand. "Wait! Give me time. I want to think. He's to meet her in the park at three o'clock, Godwin?"

He inclined his head. "Yes, miss; and they go straight on to the church, and then to the railway station for the honey—"

She flushed angrily, jealously.

"That will do! Three o'clock. If we could separate them!"

She stopped short, and began to pace the room, the men watching her closely. Presently she drew a chair to the table with a jerk, and, leaning on her elbows, looked from one to the other.

"Marquis, the newspaper fellows call me an actress, don't they?"

The marquis inclined his head.

"And justly, my dear Patsy."

"Well, I'm going to prove whether they're right or wrong," she broke in. "I'm going to do a bit of tragedy which will give Ophelia and the rest of them beans. It's a heavy part—in fact, it's the only part in the play, and if I break down—well, there'll be the devil to pay, and I shall have to find the pitch. All you will have to do—you and Godwin—will be to get the stage ready, and leave me room to spread myself."

"I don't understand, Patsy," began the marquis; but she interrupted him brusquely.

"Of course you don't till I explain. Now, look here; here's my plan. Take it or leave it, or find a better if you can. I've set my heart upon baulking this young woman, and I'm going to run some risk in doin' it. If I'm found out—well, there'll be murder, I expect, and I shall provide the interestin' corpse. See here."

She bent forward, and the two men drew nearer, and listened, at first curiously, then with a breathless intentness of wonder and excitement.

When she had finished, with a low laugh of enjoyment at her own cunning, the marquis so far forgot himself as to utter an oath, and Godwin himself muttered a word of admiration under his breath.

"It is extraordinarily clever! Wonderful!" murmured his lordship. "Patsy, you are a genius! But—"

"But it may fail!" she broke in, with a shrug of her shoulders. "And, win or lose, I run some risk, don't I? I expect Clive will wring my neck; and that would be a pity, wouldn't it? for it looks rather nice when I've got some diamonds on."

Doyme laid his hand on her shoulder, and rather heavily.

"Carry out this little scheme of yours, Patsy," he said, "and you shall have the finest necklace you can find in Bond Street."

She rose with a laugh. "Thank you, marquis. I'm doin' this to please myself, and to wipe off old scores; but I'll take the necklace, all the same."

* * * * *

Her marriage morn! Beryl sat on the edge of the bed, with her hands folded in her lap, trying to realise that she had promised to marry Clive that day. She had lain awake all night, trying to think it all out, but at such a time thought is almost impossible. How can one think when the brain is in a whirl, and the heart is beating so wildly that one can hear it on the pillow like the tick of a clock?

But from out the confusion of her mind there stood the central, gigantic fact, that Clive would make her his wife that day. To the most ordinary maiden about to be married in the most ordinary way, there is something in the great change which is coming into her life which almost frightens and awes her. She is going to give herself, for better or for worse, to a man who, for all her future, until death doth them part, will be her lord and master. She is placing more than her life in his hands—her welfare in this world, and, alas, too often, in the next.

To many what doubts must come! But Beryl was oppressed by none. She loved Clive as it is given to few men to be loved; she trusted in his love, was too ignorant of the world, indeed, to do otherwise. But she was not unmindful of her father, and it may be said that but for Clive's intention of going to Africa she would not have consented to a clandestine marriage.

She had risen early, and packed the small hand-bag which Clive had declared was all that was necessary, and there was nothing for her to do but to wait for the hour of her setting forth to meet him. She sat down and listened to the striking of the clock, and thought of the past, of the joy of her great love, of the happiness which awaited her. To be Clive's wife! What had she done to merit such felicity? She recalled the days at Trentishoe, their happy meetings in London, and, with a sudden blush and throb, told herself that for the future he would be hers, her very own. Nothing, he had said, could separate them.

It is this prospect of close union, of a life spent entirely with the loved one, which fills a woman's heart with delight and rapture. To be with him—her husband! in close communion of body and soul, "through summer's heat and winter's cold"—this is the supreme thought which nestles like a dove in the heart of the bride as she waits for the hour which will make her a wife.

The clock struck two, and Beryl started—as if she had not been waiting for the sound. She rose, and, with hands that trembled a little, put on her hat and light summer cape; for,

though there was plenty of time yet, for she need not start until the half hour, she felt she must be ready to meet her joy half-way, as it were.

As she was buttoning her glove, the servant knocked at the door, and Beryl opened it.

"There's a gentleman wants to see you, miss," said the girl. "'E's waiting in the 'all."

The blood rushed to Beryl's face. It must be Clive, of course! Had something happened? Had he found that there was some difficulty, something which rendered the marriage impossible? Her hand stole to her heart, and her voice shook a little, as she told the maid she would come down.

Godwin rose from the uncomfortable hall chair and bowed.

"Miss Frayne?" he said, interrogatively, and in a low and respectful voice.

"I am Miss Frayne—yes," said Beryl.

"I have a message from Mr. Marle, miss," he went on. "He sent me to say that he has been obliged to alter his arrangements, and to ask you if you would please come with me to meet him."

There was not the slightest suspicion or doubt in Beryl's mind; but she stood for a moment, looking at him gravely, and Godwin's eye fell under her pure and innocent ones.

"Did Mr. Marle send no other message?" she enquired.

Godwin's face was as impassive as that of a plaster cast.

"No, miss," he replied. "Those were his words. He would have written, but he met me in the street and gave me the message. He was in a hurry, I think, miss. I have a cab at the door," he added.

Beryl did not hesitate. No doubt something had happened to necessitate a change in Clive's hastily-made plans; she would be with him very soon, and he could explain.

"I will come at once," she said, as she turned to go upstairs for her bag.

When she came down, Godwin was outside, with the door of a four-wheeler in his hand. He put her in, and mounted to the box, and the cab drove off under the gaping eyes of the maid-servant.

The cab took a circuitous route to St. James's Park, and pulled up at the side entrance of Clive's house, and Godwin got down slowly and with dignity, and opened the cab door.

"Is Mr. Marle here?" Beryl asked, looking up at the handsome windows.

"Yes, miss," said Godwin. "Will you follow me, please?"

She followed him through the side passage into the hall,

and he opened the door of the drawing-room, ushered her in, and looked round.

"Mr. Marle is not here," he said, as if surprised. "He must be in his room. I will tell him you are here. Will you please sit down?"

He put a chair facing the window, but some distance from it, and Beryl looked round with natural interest and curiosity, though her heart was beating fast with excitement, and the handsomely-decorated room, with its evidences of wealth, surprised her somewhat; just as the dog-cart had done. Clive must be very rich, or perhaps this was not his own house? Then, as she looked about her, she saw, amongst the pictures and portraits on the walls, one of an old man, whose handsome face was so like Clive's that she knew he must be a relative. Perhaps it was the uncle of whom he had spoken, the uncle who wanted Clive to marry that other woman? She looked, with a strange feeling, at the aristocratic face, with its courtly smile, and thin, cynical lips; it almost seemed as if the keen eyes were regarding her with a kind of mockery.

She withdrew her gaze slowly, and looked round the room again. There were costly *bric-à-brac*, richly-bound books, exquisitely-carved statuettes. They had a kind of fascination for her, which was intensified as her eyes fell upon a silver-mounted pipe which lay on a table near her. She recognized it at once; it was the pipe Clive had smoked at Trentishoe. Her heart gave a little leap; it was Clive's room. She stretched out her hand to touch the pipe, but drew the caressing fingers back quickly, for she heard the door open, and some one enter. She turned her head, and saw a young girl standing regarding her with a half-enquiring, half-timid gaze. The girl was dressed in black, and very simply, and looked very ill and worn. There were hollows and lines in the fair face, and black marks under the blue eyes; and it was evident to Beryl that she was either very ill or in trouble; and in an instant her heart went out to her with tender pity. Then, as the girl came forward with slow and hesitating steps, and with a half-frightened glance from side to side, Beryl's pity was swallowed up in surprise, for she recognised the face as that of the portrait which she had seen in Clive's locket.

She rose and stood uncertain what to do or say for a moment, then she extended her hand hesitatingly, and said, with a blush: "I know who you are. You are Clive's—Mr. Marle's—sister?"

CHAPTER XIX.

"You are Olive's—Mr. Marle's sister!"

As Beryl faltered out the words, Patsy Pryde drew back slightly, and stared at her as if disconcerted. It was as if an actor had received the wrong cue, and was, in consequence, thrown out of his part, and at a loss what to say or to do. But it was only for a moment that her presence of mind and self-assurance deserted her; the next she recovered from her surprise, and resumed the timid, shrinking attitude and expression which she had worn when she had entered the room. She came forward slowly, so that she stood with her back to the light, which fell softly through the silken blinds upon Beryl's face.

"I—I did not know any one was here," she said; and the sad, timid voice was as clever an assumption as the artistically made-up face; both face and voice were those of a girl in deep trouble, in search of succour and help.

Beryl had never seen an actress made up for her part, and, even if she had, she would not have detected the falsity of Patsy Pryde's face, for the actress had spent hours in her work of making up, and, with the light behind her, she would have deceived even an experienced hand in such matters; to Beryl she appeared to be just what she affected to be.

The two girls looked at each other—Beryl with pitying interest, Patsy Pryde with a half-imploring, half-frightened gaze in her childish blue eyes.

"Whom have you come to see?" asked Beryl, at last; she did not know what to say.

Patsy Pryde hung her head ashamedly.

"I—I want to see the gentleman who lives here," she faltered.

"Do you mean Mr. Marle?" asked Beryl, gently. "He is not here, but he will be back presently. Will you not sit down? But I have no right to ask you—you are his sister, I know."

Patsy Pryde opened her eyes with half-real and half-feigned surprise.

"Why do you call him 'Mr.' Marle?" she asked in a low voice, "and why do you say that I am his sister?"

"Is it not Mr. Marle whom you have come to see?" demanded Beryl, in her turn. "Is it some one else? I do not know that any one else lives here. I am a stranger; have

never been here before." She blushed. "I know that you are Mr. Marle's sister, because I saw your portrait in his locket."

Patsy Pryde sank into a chair, and leant her forehead on her hand, still more effectually screening her woe-begone face.

"I don't know what you mean!" she said, sorrowfully. "I came to see Lord Marle."

"*Lord Marle!*" echoed Beryl. It must be a relation of Olive's who probably lived here with him, she thought.

"Yes; Lord Clive Marle," answered Patsy, with a sigh.

Clive! Beryl's heart leapt, and she stared at this pale-faced girl with surprise and just the faintest presentiment of coming evil.

"That is strange," she said. "I—I never heard of Lord Clive Marle; that is the Christian name of the Mr. Marle I know."

"There is only one Clive Marle," rejoined Patsy in a low voice, "and he lives here. I know, because—because I've been here often"—her voice broke—"too often."

"And you are not his sister?" said Beryl. "He told me so. I saw your portrait; I remember it quite well; I recognised you the moment you entered the room."

"I am not his sister," affirmed Patsy Pryde in a low voice. "If he told you so, it was not true. He would not care what he told you; he would deceive any woman if it suited his purpose."

Beryl looked at her in amazement.

"Why should he tell me an untruth?" she demanded.

"You ought to know better than me," replied Patsy.

"He told you a lie when he said he was Mr. Marle. He is a viscount, and the nephew of the Marquis of Doyne; he will be the next marquis."

Beryl smiled, though she trembled slightly.

"Oh, there is some mistake!" she said, gently. "We are not speaking, thinking, of the same person; the—the gentleman I know is not a viscount. I know him very well."

Patsy Pryde rose, went to a side-table, and came back, still with the light behind her, with a framed photograph in her hand. She laid it on the table near Beryl, and went back to her seat. "Is that him?"

Beryl took up the photograph—it was a cabinet, and a very good one—of Clive.

"Yes," she said.

"Then that is Lord Clive Marle, the nephew of the Marquis of Doyne," returned Patsy.

Beryl looked from the photograph to the girl. She was getting confused, bewildered. If Olive was a nobleman, the heir to a marquise, why had he concealed the fact from her? What could be his motive?

"Are you convinced?" asked Patsy.

"I—I can scarcely believe it even now," faltered Beryl. Then suddenly the blood rose to her face. If Olive had told her an untruth, and this woman were not his sister, why had she come to see Olive? Beryl knew that the girl was not a lady, though she had at first mistaken her for one; for Patsy Pryde's voice, though she used it with artistic care, betrayed her. No amount of training will entirely remove the ring of the gutter, the twang of the pavement.

"If Mr. Marle is the Lord Olive Marle you want to see," said Beryl, "he will be here presently. I will go." She moved towards the door, but Patsy Pryde's hand intercepted her.

"No, no!" she answered. "I will go. I know it was wrong to come here—wrong and foolish; though, if you knew all, perhaps you'd own that I've as much right to be here as any one—perhaps more right."

Beryl shrank back.

"I—I don't understand!" she said in a low voice. "Let me go, please!"

"No, no!" exclaimed Patsy, imploringly. "He will know that I have driven you away, and will be angry; and I don't want to make him angry, for I want him to help me."

"Want him to help you!" echoed Beryl.

"Yes," responded Patsy, with a sigh that was almost a sob. "I'm in great trouble. You look kind and gentle, and you've spoken to me as if you had a tender heart, and I feel as if I wanted to tell you my story, to tell you why I'm here like this."

She sank into a chair, her head drooping, her hands hanging by her sides.

A feeling of repulsion, a vague fear, was growing, stealing, over Beryl. Unconsciously she regarded the drooping figure with that mixture of suspicion and loathing which the pure woman, however tender-hearted, feels for the stained one. She longed to get away from her, to get beyond the reach of the sorrowful voice. She did not want to hear the girl's story. But still the question rang like a knell in her heart. Why had the woman come to see Olive?

"I know what you're thinking," said Patsy in a sullen voice. "You're thinking it's no business of yours; you want

to get rid of me. It's what all you women feel who've never known trouble like mine; there's no pity in the world for such as me. You've nothing but hard words and cold looks for the woman, but you forgive the man, and make much of him, especially if he's one like Lord Clive, handsome, and rich, and with a title to his name."

Beryl drew a sharp breath. "Why do you say this to me?" she asked. "Why do you speak of Mr.—Lord Clive in this way?"

"Because I've every right to," said Patsy. "He's brought me to this trouble; that's why I've come here to ask him to help me."

Beryl's brows drew together. "Brought you to this?" she faltered.

"Yes," said Patsy, with an admirably assumed air of desperation. "Why shouldn't I tell you all? I daresay you think him all that's good and noble. I don't know who you are; but you're here in his rooms, and must be a friend of his; and you look kind—you pitied me when I came in just now; I could see it in your eyes—you might ask him to help me." Her voice broke, and she stretched out her hand towards Beryl imploringly. "I was as good as you once," she said, with a catch in her voice. "I wasn't a lady like you, but I was an honest girl until Lord Clive came across my path."

Beryl shrank back, and put up her hand. She knew that her face was growing white.

"Don't! I—I don't want to hear! I cannot help you!"

"I've begun now," said Patsy Pryde, sullenly, "and I feel as if I must tell you. It mayn't be any good to me; you may only turn him against me worse than he is; it's likely enough; it's just what 'good' women do. They've no pity for us. And yet you'd pity me if you'd known me as I was before I met him."

She sighed heavily, and drew her hand, carefully, across her made-up eyes. Beryl leant against the table, her hand resting heavily upon it.

"My father looked after Lord Clive's horses, and Lord Clive used to come down to our farm at—I won't tell you the name. At first he only smiled and nodded when he saw me; then one day he stopped and spoke. It was only a few words; but you know him, and you know how he can speak and smile when it's a woman he's speaking and smiling at. I daresay the grand ladies, his friends, are used to it, and it doesn't have much effect upon them; but I was only a simple, ignorant

girl, and when he asked me to go for a walk with him over the Downs I couldn't refuse."

She gave a beautiful little sob, and the sob seemed to through Beryl's heart. What was this girl going to say next?

"He came down very often after that, and I went for a walk with him every time. I used to look forward to his visits; they were the bright spots in my life—such a quiet, dull life before he came; and yet I had been quite content with it. I only lived when he was with me, was only happy when he was walking with his arm round my waist, and that voice of his in my ear."

Beryl almost started. The girl was describing hers, Beryl's own feelings. She, too, had not known real happiness until Clive's arm had stolen round her waist, and his voice had sung Love's music in her ears.

"No one knew, no one suspected," Patsy went on in a low, faltering voice. "He told me that he loved me, but he begged me not to tell my father. And I did not. I was a good girl, but I forgot everything when Lord Clive was near; for I loved him with all my heart and soul. One day he came and asked me to marry him—to be his wife—"

Beryl gripped the edge of the table.

"He said I must marry him secretly; he was afraid that his uncle should know—his uncle, the marquis. He was dependent upon him, and the marquis wanted him to marry a lady in his own set. Her name's Lady Blanche Westley—you may have heard of her?"

Beryl shuddered. She remembered Clive's momentary embarrassment when the Westleys' name was mentioned.

"He said that we must be married secretly. I was afraid—I was fond of my father; I knew it was wrong; but Clive—"

Beryl shuddered again at the familiar name spoken by this woman's soiled lips.

"—Said that he had got a special licence; that the marriage could be kept secret; that we could wait until something turned up—"

Beryl felt sick and faint. For this was what Clive had said to *her*!

"—And so—so I consented. I was only an ignorant child—a farmer's daughter, not a fashionable lady up to every move and trick—and I consented. He asked me to meet him in London. We were to be married secretly in one of the quiet churches here, and then we were to go away for a night, and I was to pretend that I had been on a visit to a friend, and go back to my people, as if nothing had happened."

Beryl drew a long breath, as if she were choking. Patsy Pryde watched her with a feeling of exultation. The little comedy, tragedy, was going extremely well.

"I came up to London—to the rooms he had found for me—and waited for him to fetch me. Then a man came for me, and asked me to come to Lord Olive's rooms. I didn't suspect anything—how should I? I was too simple and ignorant! I came with the man, and I met Lord Olive here. He made some excuse about the licence; they wouldn't give it him; he was afraid of his uncle! It was all plausible enough. He said he must part with me forever, unless—unless I would go with him!"

Her fair head drooped still lower, and she covered her face with her hands. She looked the picture of grief and remorse as she went on in a low and broken voice, every tone of which was eloquent of shame.

"I loved him too well to part from him. He promised that he would marry me. I believed him. I went away with him."

Beryl uttered a faint cry, and Patsy Pryde looked up at her piteously, pleadingly.

"You think me bad, wicked? Put yourself in my place. What would you have done? Perhaps you'd have turned on him, left him? But you're a lady, and know the ways of men like Lord Olive; you're not a simple country girl like I was!"

Beryl passed her hand across her forehead. There were great drops of sweat upon it. Her heart was aching as if it had been rent in twain. Up to the last point this girl's story was Beryl's own. Olive had got her to consent to a secret marriage, had spoken of a special licence, had brought her to his rooms. Was the sequel to be the same?

"I believed in him. I left my father and my home, and went away with him. And I was happy. I trusted in him; he swore time after time that he would marry me. But he never did."

Her voice broke, and she sobbed with an artistic effect which would have done credit to the most famous of our emotional actresses. Beryl listened to the sobs, gazed at the despairful face with horror. She would have spoken, would have cried, "No more, no more!" but she was incapable of speech.

"He got tired of me after a time—they always do; I know that now. I daresay I was not the first girl Lord Olive had deceived; I daresay I sha'n't be the last. They've no pity, these fine gentlemen; they've no heart where women are con-

cerned; they've been brought up so. We are fair game for them, and the world doesn't mind, doesn't care. It's the woman who suffers; the man goes scot-free. He tired of me after a time, and told me so; told me with that musical voice of his—the same which had lured me to my ruin. He offered me money—they think money can console a woman for everything, and it does very often—but I refused it. I left him then and there. I went back home; my father refused to take me back, and I had to face the world alone. I fought my way, as many a wretched, deserted woman had done before me. If you've a heart in your bosom, you'll pity me—"

She stretched out her hand, but Beryl shrank back.

—"I suffered a good deal. You'll say I deserved it. I daresay I did. Anyway, I suffered. He didn't suffer at all. He went on in his old way, amusin' himself, just as if there wasn't a ruined woman on his conscience. I met him once in the street. He offered me money again, but I refused it. Most people would have said I was a fool; but I couldn't touch his money then after the way in which he had served me. But now I'm in trouble; I've no money left; I owe my landlady a month's rent, and I've nowhere to turn. So I came here to-day, hopin' to see him."

The tears were—or seemed to be—running down her cheeks as she pretended to wipe them away with the edge of her shawl.

"You'll help me, young lady?" she wailed. "You're a friend of his; perhaps you're going to be his wife? You'll speak a word for me; tell him you've seen me, and heard my story."

Beryl struggled against a deathly faintness.

"Your name?" she asked, sharply—so sharply that the admirable comedienne—but ought we not to say, tragedienne?—was thrown off her guard, and answered, unwittingly:

"Patsy Pryde."

She bit her lip the moment the name had escaped her, but was astonished at its effect upon Beryl; for Beryl remembered at that moment the name which had escaped Olive's lips when he lay unconscious in the mist. She uttered a low cry, and sank into a chair, her face hidden in her hands, her whole body shaking as if with the ague.

Patsy Pryde rose and approached her, but Beryl stretched out her hand, as if to ward her off, and Patsy Pryde, awed by the sorrow-stricken face and the anguished gesture, stopped half-way, as if afraid, actually afraid, to draw nearer.

Beryl's face was white, her eyes distended. At that mo-

ment Olive himself would have found it difficult to recognise in the agonised face that of the woman he loved so well.

"I—I cannot! I cannot help you! I must go! Wait—wait and tell him! He must marry you!"

Patsy Pryde, with a burst of tragic feeling which proved her an actress of the highest order, threw herself at Beryl's feet, and clasped her arm.

"Have pity on me!" she exclaimed, in accents which would have moved an audience to tears.

Beryl freed her arm, and shrank from her.

"I—I— Don't touch me! I must go!"

Patsy made another grab at her, but Beryl started away from her, staggered across the room to the door, and disappeared.

Patsy Pryde rose from her knees and drew a long breath as she wiped the perspiration from her painted brow. Her breath came fast and thickly; she had been quite carried away by her part, and when, a few minutes later, Godwin entered the room, and found her lying back in a chair, she looked up at him with a smile of exhaustion, and gasped:

"For goodness' sake, get me something to drink, for I'm quite played out!"

CHAPTER XX.

BERYL went down the garden steps, clutching the rail for support. She was giddy and faint, and half blind; a dozen conflicting emotions battled for mastery and overwhelmed her; but her predominant desire was to get away from the place and the woman who, in a few short minutes, had wrecked her life.

St. James's Park was blazing in the sunlight; a military band was blaring away on the hot gravel space in front of the house; children were rushing about and screaming. The fierce light, the noise, dazed and confused her; she stood for a moment, looking from right to left, then she hurried on to one of the paths by the lake, and, following it, found herself in a spot of comparative quiet. Here she sank down on a seat, and buried her face in her hands, and tried to think. The anguish which the effort cost her no pen can describe, for she had to go through again the scene which had just been enacted in Olive's room.

There was no doubt in her mind as to the truth of the woman's story—Patsy Pryde had played her part too well—and Beryl was fully convinced she was face to face with the

fact of Olive's treachery and wickedness. The long arm of coincidence and the evidence of Clive's guilt, even to the mind of the woman who had loved him and who loved him still, seemed crushing and irrefutable. With a shudder, she reflected that he had lied to her from the first; that he had told her the portrait of the woman he had wronged was that of his sister; he had deliberately concealed his rank and station; he had deceived her with an unscrupulousness which, at this moment, amazed as much as it horrified her.

She drew the hideous parallel between her own case and that of the woman, and reflected that its stopping short at a certain point was due to the chance meeting with his earlier victim.

A girl with a larger knowledge of the world—most girls, indeed—would have remained to confront the man who they thought had deceived them, and to charge him with his baseness; but Beryl Frayne had very little knowledge of the world, and still less of the men who walk in it; and she had no desire to meet Clive. Her misery was too great to find place for the indignation necessary to give her strength for such a course. She prayed, as she sat with her face covered with her hands, that she might never see him nor hear of him again.

She sat almost motionless, recalling the scene through which she had gone; and not only that, but others of a happier kind which she had enacted with Clive at Trentishoe. It seemed to her that there must be two men who bore that name; the man who had been all that was tender and noble, who had saved her life at the risk of his own, who had won her love by the display of qualities which would have endeared him to any pure-minded girl; the other, a heartless man of the world, who had sought by every art to betray the girl who loved and trusted him.

And between these two personalities, Clive Marle, who had won her love at Trentishoe, and Lord Clive Marle, who had deceived her, she oscillated, so to speak, like a pendulum—swayed towards one by love, and towards the other by hate and fear and loathing.

The passers-by glanced at her curiously; the children, playing noisily round the seat, paused every now and then, and gazed at her with wide-open eyes and mouth. One little mite ventured close to her, and patted her on the lap, lisping, "What's 'oo cryin' for?" Beryl raised her hot eyes, to which no tears had brought relief, and shrank from the child's well-meant sympathy. She rose, and went hurriedly to another part of the park. In the midst of her misery a thought arose

which took hold on her; it was the desire to let Clive know that she had discovered his baseness, and to tell him that she had escaped him. She went to a stationer's shop, and bought a sheet of note-paper and envelope, and asked for pen and ink.

With trembling fingers she wrote:

"I have discovered who and what you are. I pray that I may never see you or hear of you again.

"BERYL FRAYNE."

She addressed this to Lord Clive Marle, and went back to the park with it in her hand. When she had got within sight of the house, she looked round, and found a boy lounging on a seat. She pointed out the house, and told him to take the letter to it, and gave him sixpence. She waited until she had seen him deliver the letter, then she turned and hurried out of the park, and wandered about the streets in an aimless way, unconscious of the flight of time, or the direction her steps were taking.

It seemed to her that she was another person than the Beryl Frayne who had sat in the boarding-house that morning, waiting for her lover to come and make her his wife. Something had happened to that Beryl Frayne, that happy girl lingering on the threshold of an earthly Paradise; she had disappeared, vanished, engulfed by a great sorrow, a terrible calamity, and in her place was the heart-broken woman who had left girlhood a long way behind her, and upon whom the gates of Paradise were closed forever.

The striking of a clock in one of the churches near her roused her to a sense of time. She looked round the unfamiliar streets, and wondered where she was, and her loneliness and helplessness came crushing down upon her like a leaden weight.

Presently, the desire of the wounded animal to hide itself assailed her. Her aching heart longed for the peace and quietude and security of home.

She remembered that there was a train, an evening train to Devonshire. Why should she not go by it? She remembered the opera, but she felt as if she could not face the strange people at the theatre, as if she would be incapable of singing a note, or even of carrying on the most ordinary conversation. She must go home, for a time at any rate; she could write from Trentishoe to the manager of the theatre. She could not remain in London another night.

But as she thought of Trentishoe, of all that its familiar scenes would remind her, her heart was racked by a fresh

agony. Where could she fly to find forgetfulness of her misery?

She went to the station and took her ticket. There was more than an hour to wait, and she spent it crouching in a corner of the hard sofa in the bare and comfortless waiting-room, leaning her head against the wall, and trying, with closed eyes, to shut out the remembrance of Clive Marle's shaded room and the black-garbed women with the pale and hollow face. She had eaten nothing since the morning, and physical faintness was added to her mental agony, and produced a kind of stupor; she rose, and went with feeble steps to the refreshment-room, and asked for a glass of milk, but, though she put it to her lips, she found she could not drink it, and she set it down with a sigh, and went on to the platform.

The train came up at last, and she got into it, and leant back in a corner of the carriage. She was almost exhausted and worn out, and after a time she fell asleep in the uncomfortable attitude which the railway traveller knows so well. At one of the stations, a woman with a couple of children got in, and the little ones began to talk noisily, until the woman, a motherly-looking person, with a round, good-natured face, quieted them.

"They're waking you up, miss," she said, apologetically. "Children do love to talk, don't they? But I'll keep them quiet, and won't let them disturb you, for I can see that you've been ill, and I know what it is to sit in a railway train when you're more fit to be lying abed."

She folded up a capacious cloak, and made a pillow of it, and insisted upon Beryl lying full length.

The tears tried to force themselves to Beryl's eyes as she thanked the woman, but they would not come; it seemed to her that she should never be able to cry any more. She fell asleep again after a time, and she did not wake until the train reached Ilfracombe. The woman took back her cape, and, with the same kindly persistence, insisted upon seeing Beryl safe upon the coach.

"You see, I've got a daughter about your age, miss," she said, with a smile, "and she was always delicate, just like you. She's married now, and a very good husband she's got, I'm thankful to say; for marriage is all a lottery, ain't it, miss, and there's three bad men to one good 'un, as you may say."

Beryl tried to thank her again, but the words would not

come from her white lips, and she held out her hand. The woman took it, and pressed it with motherly kindness.

"Good-bye, miss," she said. "You take care of yourself; but there's some as 'ull be only too glad to take care of you, I know."

The coach went on its way over the glorious hills and through the fertile vales which poets have sung and artists have painted; but the beauty of the familiar scenery brought no consolation to the sorrow-stricken girl who looked upon it, seeing nothing but that softly-shaded room and the pale face of the woman who had revealed Clive Marle's wickedness.

The coach set her down at the road leading to Trentishoe, and Beryl stood for a moment in the brilliant sunshine of the early morning, feeling as if every tree, every fern, every wayside flower of the familiar road were staring at her with mocking eyes. Surely she was not the Beryl Frayne who had walked down this leafy lane, singing as she went, only a few weeks ago!

Wearily, with feet which felt as if they were shod with lead, she made her way to the Enchanted Valley. At every turn of the road there was something to remind her of Clive. It was here that he had waited for her the day they went to the Weir Water; there was the church, in the porch of which she and Clive had been locked; under that big elm at the foot of the narrow path leading to Hill Cote, how often had the dog-cart waited to take them on some happy expedition! Far away against the sky towered the tor on which she had lost him in the mist, the day when he had told her of his love, and asked her to be his wife.

What had become of that Clive Marle? Was he dead, or had he never existed? She leant against the tree for a moment or two, and looked vacantly before her. Was it all a dream; a dream beginning so happily, and ending so hideously?

She dragged herself up the narrow path, and reached the terrace. As she glanced up at the cottage, she noticed that the blinds were down; but the sun was shining full upon the house, and the shaded windows did not impress her. There was a strange air of quietude about the place, there was no sound of organ or violin; but she thought that her father was resting.

She had not thought very much of him. Let poets say what they may, a great sorrow, like a great joy, makes us selfish. Now she was approaching him, she remembered his love for her, and all his goodness to her and his care for her. She must never let him know of her love for Clive Marle, of her

discovery of his baseness. They would go on, she and her father, living their old life; she would never leave Trentishoe again—would never, if she could help it, speak to a stranger; no cloistered nun could lead a more secluded life than she would lead. Perhaps, in time, she would learn to forget the man who had won her love and sought to betray her. It would be hard. Forgiveness would come quickly enough, for she knew, woman-like, that to love once is to forgive always. But to forget! How hard that would be, with his face thrilling through her mind, with his love vows ringing in her heart!

As she opened the rustic gate, the door on the verandah opened, and Mrs. Saunders came on to the verandah. At sight of Beryl, of the pale face and drooping, weary figure, the woman started and stood still.

"Miss Beryl!" she exclaimed; and she stared at Beryl as if the girl were a ghost.

Beryl tried to smile. She must enact a part from henceforth, the part of the girl who has nothing on her mind, no anguish at her heart, and the sooner she began to practise this difficult part the better.

"I have come back, Mrs. Saunders," she said, trying to speak lightly; but her voice sounded dull and constrained in her own ears, and she was not surprised that Mrs. Saunders should stare at her with a kind of amazement. "I am glad you are here," she said. "Is my father all right?"

The woman seemed to gasp for breath.

"Oh, Miss Beryl!" she said at last. "Oh, dear, oh, dear!"

The woman's surprise and consternation struck Beryl. She sank on to one of the seats in the verandah, and looked at her with the same forced smile.

"Are you so surprised to see me?" she asked. "I told my father in my letter that I might be home any day."

Mrs. Saunders gasped, and leant against one of the uprights of the verandah.

"That other letter, miss!" she said, with deep agitation.

"Oh, miss, it warn't my fault!"

"What do you mean?" demanded Beryl, pushing the hair from her forehead, and gazing wearily, not at the woman, but at the view below her. How often had Clive Marle come up that narrow path, how often had she looked down upon him with Love singing a welcome in her heart!

"It warn't my fault, miss," repeated Mrs. Saunders, with a catch in her voice. "I give it to Saunders, and told him to read it to the master; he's a better scholar than I am, an' he do read fairly well when he's put to it; and that very mornin',

as bad luck would have it, he was sent for to Moor Park, and o' course he took the letter with him, an' forgot all about 'un!"

Beryl sighed. "But you told my father where I had gone, and read him the letter, I suppose?" she said, wearily.

The woman looked at her with a mixture of fear and pity.

"No, I didn't, miss," she answered in a low voice. "It were too late!"

"Too late!" echoed Beryl. "What do you mean? Surely you could have read the letter to him, or told him what it contained?"

"It were too late, miss," repeated the woman. "Don't you blame me, miss. It were all Saunders' fault, as I've told him scores of times ever since."

"I don't understand!" said Beryl. "Do you mean that you've not told my father why I went to London?"

Mrs. Saunders began to cry, after the manner of her kind—that is to say, with a mixture of sob and snuffle.

"It were too late, miss," she said. "Your poor father—"

Something in the woman's tones brought Beryl to her feet.

"What do you mean?" she exclaimed. "What is it you are saying? My father—where is he?"

She rose as she spoke, and moved towards the door. Mrs. Saunders intercepted her.

"Wait—oh, wait, miss!" she implored. "You mustn't go in till I've told you. I must break it to you!"

"Break it to me! What do you mean?" panted Beryl. "Father!" she cried.

Mrs. Saunders caught her by the arm. "Hush! Oh, my dear! My dear! He can't hear you! Don't call on him like that! Oh, Miss Beryl, don't you know—can't you guess what's happened?"

Beryl stood staring at the woman with amazement, and a vague, undefined fear which turned her heart to ice.

"What is it you mean?" she panted.

The tears ran down Mrs. Saunders' face.

"Oh, Miss Beryl! Oh, my dear!" she gasped. "I can't break it to you! I must tell you. Your father—he's been very ill!"

"My father—ill!"

She tore herself from the woman's detaining hand, and darted into the house. She flew into the drawing-room, expecting to see her father lying back in his easy-chair. The room was empty. A sheet of music was on the organ, his violin lay on the table; but he was not there. She ran out of

the room, and sped upstairs; at the door of his bedroom she paused for a moment, but only for a moment, then she went in.

He was lying on the bed, strangely motionless, amidst a silence profound as death itself. She went to the bed, and bent over him with a cry of "Father!" Then she recoiled, her hands outstretched, her face white as the face which lay on the pillow.

"Father!" she cried once more; then she fell on her knees beside the bed, her arms thrown across the still figure.

Mrs. Saunders had followed her.

"Don't you take on, Miss Beryl!" she sobbed. "He's dead, and no crying, and no tears can call him back. He's dead. God rest his soul!"

Beryl sprang to her feet.

"Dead! It's a lie!" she shrieked. "I left him well and strong! He is not dead!"

Mrs. Saunders tried to take her in her arms, but Beryl broke from her, and flung herself upon her father in a frenzy of grief and despair. "Oh, Miss Beryl, indeed he's dead!" said the woman.

Beryl raised her head and stared at the dead face of her father. She could not believe it. She expected him every moment to open his sightless eyes, and speak to her.

"Father!" she cried. "It is I—Beryl! Speak to me! Only one word! See, I am here, waiting!"

The dead make no response. Though they may watch over their beloved ones from the Unknown World, they make no sign. They have reached that bourne whence no traveller returns. They make no sign.

Beryl shrank back, as we all shrink from the dread form of Death, from that transformation which changes Life into the Unknown; and for a moment or two, all thought, all feeling was benumbed, as if a hand of ice had clutched her heart.

Mrs. Saunders awakened her to the sense of her loss. "This letter, miss!" she gasped.

There was an old letter lying on the white coverlid, quite close to the dead hand, as if it had dropped from it at the moment when Death touched it. Beryl took up the letter mechanically, and read it. The ink was faded, but the characters were still plain.

She read it as one reads in a dream.

"MY HUSBAND,—I have left you forever. Do not attempt to follow or find me.
BEATRICE FRAYNE."

Beryl knew that it was her mother's letter; knew that her father had thought that she, the daughter, had followed in her mother's erring footsteps. And the thought, the conviction, had killed him.

CHAPTER XXI.

WHAT had become of Olive? He had risen that morning in a state of suppressed excitement; a man doesn't get married every day. He had got the licence and the ring; he had taken the tickets for Seaforth and reserved a compartment; had even arranged for a substantial tea-basket. In fact, his preparations were so complete that there seemed nothing left for him to do by which to pass the time and soothe the restless impatience which possessed him.

So he went down Bond Street and bought things for Beryl.

He purchased a keeper ring studded with pearls and diamonds; a bracelet, chaste and costly, and a pendant in which he meant to put his photograph. He would have it taken at Seaforth; and he would have one taken with Beryl by his side. Then it occurred to him that he ought to buy something useful, really useful, you know; and he went into a fashionable milliner's and purchased three dozen of extremely light and extremely long kid gloves, which would probably have lasted Beryl for the remainder of her natural life.

It struck even Olive that they could scarcely come under the category of "useful," and he looked round for something else; but there did not appear to be anything which he could buy, at the risk of fitting her, except some lace handkerchiefs. These he bought, and if they were not exactly useful—seeing that there was a great deal of lace and very little handkerchief—they were certainly expensive.

With his pockets bulging out with the soft parcels, he went home and fidgeted about.

Then it suddenly occurred to him that his portmanteau wasn't packed, and that it would be as well if he did it himself. In fact, it would be a prudent thing to give the faithful Parsons a holiday, and to send him out of the way. So he rang the bell, and somewhat astonished the faithful Parsons by telling him that he could go on the spree for the rest of the day.

Parsons smiled respectfully.

"I never go on the spree, my lord," he said; "but I shall be glad to run down to see my brother, who keeps a little pub-

lie on the Epping road—if you're sure your lordship doesn't want me to-day?"

"It's almost incredible, Parsons, but I sha'n't," answered Clive, blithely. "You go and see your brother, and have a good time. And, by-the-way, here's something for you to sample his liquor with."

He crumpled up a ten-pound note and tossed it over to the still more astonished but grateful Parsons, who paused outside the door, and rubbing his chin, murmured:

"Now, I wonder what his lordship's up to? He's been very strange ever since he came from Devonshire, but he's stranger than ever this morning. Mischief, I'll bet my life! But, there! he's a Marle, and they're always up to mischief—at least, they've always been ever since I've known them. But they've got good hearts. Fancy his giving me a tenner, and him not too flush, as I know!"

Clive waited until Parsons had gone off the premises, then he went down to the club and had some lunch; that is to say, he ordered food and drink, and tried to consume them; but the effort was a failure.

"I wonder whether every fellow who's going to be married feels like this?" he said to himself. "I'm all of a tremble; my heart's beating with a healthy jump that would make Sir William stare."

He tried to smoke a cigar, but the tobacco did not in this case act as a sedative, and he flung the choice Havana away only half finished, which was a pity, considering that we are informed by those who ought to know that the real Havana will very soon be extinct as the dodo.

Then he went back to his room, changed his correct morning garb for a tweed suit, in which he looked absurdly young and handsome, called a cab, tossed his portmanteau on the top, leapt inside, and was driven to Battersea Park Gate. He told the cabman to wait, and hurried to the meeting-place, the seat in front of the shrubs, behind which Godwin had so successfully played the part of eavesdropper and spy. But he need not have hurried, for on looking at his watch, he found that he was five-and-twenty minutes before his time.

He walked up and down and round about for ten minutes, always with his eye on the seat and the path by which Beryl would come; then suddenly he stopped short and thrust his hand into his breast-pocket.

He had forgotten the licence! He actually went pale as he called himself all the idiots under the sun. What should he

do: go back now for it, or wait for Beryl? He calculated that there would be just time, or very nearly time, to fetch the thing, and he rushed out of the park, got into the cab, and told the man to drive like the devil. Having reached the house, he rushed upstairs to his room, found the licence in the pocket of his morning coat, dashed down again, and bade the cabman take him back with equal speed. The man whipped up his horse and would have reached Battersea Park Gate in good time, but, unfortunately, in taking the "near cut," which is proverbially dangerous, he got blocked by an overturned cart.

Olive swore.

"Better go back," he said. But the carter assured him that he should clear the road in a minute, and Olive, fuming, waited. The carter proved too sanguine, and the cab had to turn back after all. This meant the loss of some five minutes, and when Olive reached the gate, he was ten minutes behind time.

He hurried to the seat. Beryl was not there, and Olive drew a breath of relief. It would have been a bad omen if he had kept her waiting. He sat down and wiped the perspiration from his brow. He was all right now; he had got the licence and the ring. Beryl would come up presently, her lovely face a little pale, her sweet lips tremulous; he knew exactly how she would look. In half an hour she would be his wife, his very own. He pondered over this as a man thinks of some great good fortune which is going to befall him, and the minutes passed by no means unhappily.

But presently it struck him that Beryl was late; and it suddenly occurred to him that she might have come to the place, and, not seeing him, and unwilling to sit there alone, had strolled for some little distance. He jumped up and walked up the central path, looking about him, and as he could not find her, he began to grow impatient and a little anxious—only a little, because he could not imagine any cause for her breaking so important an appointment. Something must have detained her; she would be here presently, he told himself. He wandered back to the seat, waited there for a few minutes, then searched the narrower paths and that by which she usually came. The minutes grew into half an hour, and his anxiety grew with them. His imagination set to work in the charmingly discomfiting way which imagination has when we are anxious, and pictured for him all kinds of likely and unlikely accidents which might have happened to her. He saw her under the hoofs of a cab horse, knocked down by a

bicycle, assailed by a drunken man. In all his life, Olive's imagination had never been so lively and so fertile.

It kept him hard at work for another twenty minutes, and by that time passive endurance of the suspense had become impossible. He must go in search of her. He left the park reluctantly, and took a cab to the boarding-house in Flower Street. The servant-girl received him with open-eyed surprise and a stare of admiration and awe.

"Miss Frayne? She've gone out, sir," she said, shrilly, to the enquiry which he put as calmly as he could.

"Gone out!" exclaimed Olive.

"Yes, sir," she said, with a nod of importance. "She went out some time ago; lemme see, it must 'ave bin more than a 'our ago. Won't you step in an' wait for her, sir?"

She felt that the presence of such an evident "swell" in the second-rate boarding-house would be a decided credit to it.

Olive stood and stared at the girl almost as wide-eyed as she was.

"Did Miss Frayne say where she was going—leave any message? But of course she wouldn't!"

"No, sir," said the girl; "I can't say as she did. The young lady went off with the gentleman in a cab without a word, an' quite sudden, as you may say."

Olive uttered an exclamation.

"A gentleman—a cab!" he gasped.

"Yes, sir; it were a four-wheeler," the girl informed him unctuously. She scented a mystery and romance, one of those with which her favourite novelette always abounded, and she was enjoying herself amazingly.

Olive stared at her and at the hideous wall-paper in the hall with a feeling of bewilderment more easily imagined than described.

"What sort of gentleman?" he asked; and as he spoke he transferred a sovereign from his pocket to the girl's grimy hand.

Now, description is not the forte of the London servant-girl, and this one was at fault; but she tried to rise to the occasion and to earn the vast sum of money which this handsome "swell" had bestowed upon her. She recalled some personages which appeared in the pages of her favourite novelette, and described an individual so unlike Godwin that his own mother would not have been able to identify him.

"He were a tall gentleman, with dark, curly 'air an' a pleasant smile. His 'ands was white, an' 'e 'ad a distin-

guished air with 'im." She was so pleased with the success of her description that she enlarged upon it with all a London servant-girl's self-confidence. "'E 'ad a takin' way with 'im —'e give me a five-pun note—an' I think 'e was a nobleman in disguise; I fancy as 'ow I 'eard the young lady call 'im 'my lord;' but I shouldn't like to swear to that. 'Owsom-ever, they went off quite friendly like, an' as if she'd expected 'im."

Poor Clive stood and gaped at her, just as her friends, the baker's and the butcher's boys, might have gaped under similar circumstances. Peasant and peer, the noble viscount and the tradesman's lad, do not differ very much, after all, and in certain situations they will behave in exactly the same way.

"Do you know where they went?" he asked, feeling, as he put the question, that it was a foolish and useless one.

"No, I don't," she replied. "The cab went up the street quite quiet like."

She spoke as if she was sorry that truth would not permit her to state that the cab went off amidst a display of fireworks or accompanied by a brass band.

Clive leant against the door, his eyes fixed on his boots, his brain in a whirl. He stood so long silent and motionless that the girl, after feasting her eyes upon him in silence for some minutes, said, invitingly:

"You're sure you won't come in an' wait, sir? She may come back, an' then she'd be sorry you'd missed her. You could wait in our best parlour."

Clive started.

"No, thanks," he said.

He absently gave her another sovereign, and turned away, and the girl went through the pretence of shutting the door, and watched him through the chink with curious eyes.

She was immensely satisfied with herself, and only hoped that she might be lucky enough to see the *dénouement* of the romance.

It had been a good day's work for her, but it is an open question whether she valued the mysterious element of the affair or the two sovereigns most highly.

Clive stood with his hands on the hatch of the cab, bewildered and irresolute. The whole thing seemed improbable and fabulous.

Why had Beryl broken her appointment? Why had she gone off in a cab? And who was this man with whom she had gone? Was it the manager of the Coronet?

The girl's absurd description fitted an actor-manager fairly

well. But if Beryl had gone with the man on some important business connected with the opera, she would surely have left some message, have written to him, Clive.

He knew how dearly she loved her father, and that even on this, her wedding-day, she might feel that it was her duty to regard his interests before her own or even Clive's. She might have gone off with the manager or one of his satellites, but surely she would have left a message or a pencilled note. Perhaps at that moment she was waiting for him at the place of meeting; had got rid of the manager, and had gone to keep her tryst, though late. With hope surging anew in his breast, he was driven once again to the park, and hurried to the familiar seat.

Beryl was not there. He sat down and tried to think, to decide upon some course of action.

Her flight—if flight it could be called—was so mysterious, so unexpected, that he felt overwhelmed and utterly at a loss to account for it. No woman, Beryl least of all women, would desert her bridegroom on the day of her marriage without some grave and serious reason. And he could think of none.

He sat with his head on his hands, hunting for a solution of the mystery, until a neighbouring clock roused him by striking the hour. Then, with a feeling of utter helplessness, he decided to go home. He did not expect to find her there, for he knew that Beryl would not go to his house. Why should she?

He went up the garden steps slowly and heavily. For the first time since his sojourn at Trentishoe his heart beat with that tick! tick! which had made Sir William, the famous doctor, so grave and stern.

The house was perfectly quiet, the sunlight fell softly upon the spot upon which Beryl had stood as she listened to Patsy Pryde's well-acted story; but there was no guardian angel to tell Clive that his beloved one had only a short hour or two ago been present in this very room.

He sat with his head in his hands, a prey to that anxiety which consumes those who know not where to turn to free themselves from a tangled web of doubt and despair.

Despair is not too grave a word by which to describe his emotion. To be robbed of one's bride in the very hour before one's marriage is a fate which befalls but few men, and the loss simply crushed him. He could not for long sit still, and presently he jumped up and went back to the park to find, instead of Beryl, a nurse-maid and two children disporting

themselves on the seat which had become sacred to him. He wandered about like a lost spirit for over an hour, then he dragged himself back to his rooms, with a wild hope that he might find her there. But she was not there. He could not rest. He drove to Flower Street and learnt—from the landlady this time—that Miss Frayne had not returned.

Suddenly he thought of the theatre, and he went down to the Coronet. Stage door-keepers are generally taciturn and morose, and this one was no exception to the rule. He eyed Clive as if he had done him, the door-keeper, a personal injury by putting the question, "Has Miss Frayne been here to-day?" and he turned over some letters moodily before replying with an abstracted air:

"Miss Frayne? The lady as is connected with the new opera? No, she ain't; not as I'm aware of."

"Go and ask," said Clive, almost sternly; and his haggard face and deep voice so impressed the man that he went into the dim and mysterious regions behind the scenes to enquire, and returned with no less a personage than the manager himself.

"You are enquiring for Miss Frayne?" said that individual, with a stage bow and smile, and a rather curious look in his green-grey eyes, for Clive's appearance and presence impressed him. "Some swell she's connected with," he thought. "Miss Frayne has not been here to-day. I expected her, and we are needing her assistance, but she has not been here. Shall I say that you have asked for her and give her your name?" he enquired, suavely.

"Thanks; it does not matter," replied Clive.

He walked back to his rooms in an almost exhausted condition. The problem seemed insoluble. Where had she gone, and with whom? Who was the man answering to the grotesque description given by the servant-girl at Flower Street?

The silence and solitude of his luxurious room oppressed him, and, so to speak, daunted him. He did not know which way to turn, where to go. He thought of Trentishoe; perhaps she had gone there. The mysterious individual who had called for her with a cab might have been a messenger from her father who, say, had suddenly been taken ill. There was no wire to Trentishoe, so that he could not telegraph; but he could go down by the evening train.

He drew a breath of relief. Yes, that was what he would do. He would go down to Trentishoe, and he would find her there in the Enchanted Valley. And when he got there he

no clandestine marriage; he would claim her as his own and marry her before the sight of all men. He did not care what the consequences might be. She should be his, his wife, let the marquis do his worst.

He rang for some tea, and in the absence of Parsons it was brought by a timid maid-servant, who scarcely lifted her eye to glance at her master, and hurried out of the room as quickly as she could. While Clive was drinking his tea, the maid knocked at the door and came in with a letter on a salver.

Clive took it mechanically, and, without glancing at it, tossed it on the table beside him. Then he paced up and down, the problem ever before him, the mystery standing like a stone wall in front of his mind—impassable. In the midst of his pacing, his eye fell upon the letter which the maid had brought. Mechanically, absently, he took it up. The handwriting of the address was not familiar to him. It was the first letter Beryl had ever written to him.

He opened it impatiently, and read it as one reads a letter when one's mind is fixed on other things.

Then, suddenly, the sense of it dawned, broke, upon him. He stood in the middle of the room, staring at the common sheet of paper, at the shaky characters. It was some minutes before its significance broke upon him. He repeated the lines again and again, as if they were written in a foreign language difficult to understand. Then, with the note crushed in his hands, he sank into a chair, and with white face and distended eyes gazed before him into vacancy.

The problem was solved. Beryl herself had vouchsafed the solution. She had discovered who and what he was—had let him, had thrown him over, cast him from her.

CHAPTER XXII.

THEY buried Sebastian Frayne in the little church-yard over which his music had floated so often through the open windows of the church. The chief mourner had been Beryl; there had been no other relative of the dead man, and the little group which stood round the grave was composed of his few neighbours and the simple Trentishoe folk who, though they knew and had seen so little of the blind man, came forward to pay their last tribute of respect to him who had given them of his best for so many years, and express their sympathy for the broken-hearted girl whom they had all learnt to love.

She stood beside the open grave with a white but tearless face. Intense grief stupefies, and she had not yet realised her

loss; such realisation would come slowly, but with all the more terrible force, when she was left alone in the home she had shared with her father, who had been, until her ill-fated meeting with Clive Marle, everything in the world to her.

The Trentishoe people were tender-hearted and full of sympathy, and they lost no time in offering their assistance to the bereaved girl. The vicar—his wife had been with Beryl every day since her father's death—went up to Hill Cote on the day after the funeral. He found her not overwhelmed with a paroxysm of grief, but with the same white face and tearless eyes which she had shown by the grave-side.

She looked so statuesque, so devoid of the power of emotion, as she stood before him and listlessly gave him her cold hand, that the good man, who had come up with the usual supply of scriptural condolences and consolations, was too embarrassed and affected to utter one of them; and, in place of the stereotyped texts and verses from funeral hymns, he faltered:

"And now, what do you mean to do, my dear?"

Beryl looked at him vacantly, and gazed through the window, against which she leant as if too weak to stand upright.

"I do not know," she said, in the dull voice, and with the apathy of one who is utterly indifferent to her future.

"You have no plans?" asked the vicar.

Beryl shook her head.

"No," she answered. "I have not thought. I do not seem able to think."

"I can quite understand that," he said, soothingly. "But, my dear, you must try to think now. You have to carry the burden of life, and we all of us desire to lighten it for you."

"You are very good," responded Beryl; but there was no warmth of gratitude in her tone; she was incapable of any emotion, of any feeling, save that of despair.

"Do you know anything of your father's affairs?" he asked, after a pause.

Beryl shook her head again.

"Very little. I know that he was very poor, and that we lived by the money he got as organist and by his compositions."

"You do not know whether he has left any money behind him?" asked the vicar.

"There is a little—about fifty pounds," replied Beryl. "I put it in the drawer myself."

"It is not much; but it is better than nothing," the vicar remarked. "But you could not live on it for very long; and one must live, my dear."

"Yes, one must live," she repeated, with a deep sigh, as if she regretted the necessity.

"Of course we shall offer you the post which your poor father filled so brilliantly." Beryl did not thank him, and indeed he did not wait for thanks, but went on: "And I have no doubt you could earn some money by teaching. Would you like to come to the vicarage and be governess to our two little girls? My wife begged me to tell you how more than pleased she would be to have you."

Beryl tried to feel grateful and to thank him, but he saw by the expression of her face that she would not accept the offer.

"I don't want to press you, my dear," he said, "but if you will come we will try to make you happy."

"I could not," she replied. "I could not go to any one. I feel as if I must be alone, as if I could not bear to be with people, however kind they were. I am very grateful, but—I want to be alone."

"It is not good to be alone, my dear," he said.

"It will be better for me than going among people," answered Beryl. "I will take the organ, if you will let me, and I will try to get some pupils. I can live on very little. I want to stay in this house where he—where he and I were so happy together until—" Her voice did not break, but she looked beyond the kind old man as if for the moment she had forgotten his presence.

"Very well," he said. "You could have Saunders and his wife to live with you, and I trust you will feel that you have none but friends round you who will do their best to console you and watch over you. When the first anguish of your grief has passed, you will come among us, my dear, and let us show you how deeply we sympathise with you, and how sincerely we hope to lead you back to happiness."

He went away only half satisfied, though he had done his best, and Beryl was left alone. She passed through the window on to the terrace, and, with her hands clasped on the rail, looked across the valley with still tearless eyes and white, set face. There was remorse mingled with her grief, for she knew that it was not only her father's loss she was sorrowing for, but the loss of the man who had won her love and had proved base and unworthy.

She tried to cast all thought of Olive from her mind, to tear him from her heart; but she could not do so.

She felt that she ought to hate him, this man who had sought to betray her, who had been indirectly the cause of her father's death. And added to the anguish of her double be-

reavement was the knowledge of her mother's fate, which she had learnt from the faded letter lying near her father's dead hand.

Little wonder if he had thought his daughter had followed in her mother's footsteps, that she had inherited the taint of her mother's shame. Of that mother Beryl dared scarcely think; she had seemed to Beryl as one of the angels, and all the while—

How could she accept shelter and hospitality from these simple souls, with the knowledge of her mother's shameful secret burning like a fire within her breast? No; she must live alone, set apart from all, until death brought her peace and forgetfulness.

The days passed, the neighbours came to see her, and she saw them; but, though she sat and listened to their well-meant efforts of consolation, she never once "gave way," as they put it, but maintained the unnatural composure which she had displayed from the first.

When Sunday came round, the vicar walked up after breakfast to tell her that he had made arrangements for the organ for that Sunday, and any other until she felt fit enough to take her familiar place there; but he found her ready dressed, with a roll of music in her hand, and she startled him by the composure with which she declared her intention of taking the organ that morning.

"Why should I not?" she said.

"But will you be able to stand it, my dear?" he stammered.

"Why not to-day as well as any other?" she remarked, apathetically. "I should feel it, if it were next Sunday or a year hence; and"—she paused for a moment—"I should not like any one else to touch the organ; it would seem like sacrilege. I am going down to play something before the service begins, to get used to it."

"You will break down, my dear," he said, gently and anxiously.

"No, I shall not break down," she replied, quietly.

She would not let him go with her to the church, but went alone.

At the flower-strewn grave she stood with hands clasped and head lowered, but no tears fell on the white crosses and wreaths; and she turned away and went up to the organ loft with the same stony calmness.

As she struck the first note of music, a shudder ran through her; but she set her teeth hard and played on, and when the

congregation came in they heard the strains of one of Mozart's voluntaries ringing out with clear and unfaltering notes, as if the dead man himself were playing.

Many were the pitying glances cast up at the curtains which screened the unhappy girl, and once or twice the vicar's voice was broken as he read the prayer for those in trouble, and for the orphan and bereaved.

He waited in the porch to say a word or two to her, to beg her to come home with him to the vicarage for that day, at least; but Beryl remained at the organ until she heard him close the church door. And as it shut softly behind him, she thought, with a dull pang, of the day Clive and she had been locked in, and she shuddered again, with something like horror, as she realised that for all her life the memory of her false lover would obtrude itself upon her grief for the father who had loved her so truly.

For some weeks she only left Hill Cote to go to the church, and very few saw the slim, black-robed figure as it moved slowly and with bent head along the familiar path; for she went early, and always remained until the congregation had left and the church was empty.

Sorrow which can find no vent and relief in tears will kill surely though slowly, and Beryl was getting ill and weak. She spent the day sitting in the parlour or pacing up and down the terrace; she ate little or nothing, neither played nor sang nor read, but passed her whole time in unbroken communion with her grief; and little wonder that she grew thin and weak and the shadow of her former self. Mrs. Saunders tried to woo her, and even in a motherly way to scold her, out of a condition which the woman knew to be full of peril; but Beryl, though she bore Mrs. Saunders' remonstrances patiently enough, only smiled and shook her head when the woman begged and implored her to go for a walk, to go and see some of the neighbours, to even read or play the piano, and with a faint smile said that she was quite well and was better at home; she did not want to play and could not read.

In very truth, she shrank from the thought of taking any other road than that which led to the church; for she knew that every path up the valley and across the moor, every bend of the river, would be eloquent of the man she had loved, and of that brief time of joy, the memory of which haunted her day and night. But one day Mrs. Saunders was more than usually persistent.

"You're getting thinner and thinner every day, Miss Beryl," she said, "and little wonder, seeing as you don't eat

enough to keep a sparrow alive. And, mark my words, miss, you'll break down presently and take to your bed. It ain't to be expected that you should get better, sorrowing and moping in the house all day, you as used to take so much exercise, walking and fishing like a boy. Why, you used to be out all day with Mr. Marle—"

Beryl had been lying back in a chair, scarcely listening, and looking vacantly beyond Mrs. Saunders' homely face, but at the mention of Clive's name she started and winced as if the woman had struck her. Her eyes closed for a moment, and her thin white hands gripped the chair, then she rose, and with pale lips said:

"I will go out."

"That's a dear good girl," said Mrs. Saunders. "I'll get 'ee the things," she added, quickly, as if she were afraid Beryl might change her mind; and she ran upstairs and brought the plain straw hat with its black band and the little black cashmere cape, put them on Beryl with tender, trembling hands, and hurried her across the terrace. "Now go for a good walk, but not too far, miss," she said, "and do 'ee come back with some'n' like an appetite, for I'm a'most heart-broke wi' cookin' dainties as 'ee nothing more than touch with a fork."

Beryl forced a smile as she looked up at her, and then went slowly up the valley. As she had expected, every step of the way was eloquent of Clive; but she looked straight before her, and set her lips tightly as she tried to expel all thought of him from her mind and to dwell only upon the memory of her father.

She succeeded fairly well for a time, and she was almost glad that she had yielded to Mrs. Saunders' persuasion. She walked on half mechanically, and followed the winding of the river, her eyes fixed on the ground. And presently, without knowing it, she came upon the spot where the adder had bitten her and where Clive had risked his life for her. She raised her head and looked round. So acute and vivid was the memory of that day, that hour, that it seemed to her as if she could feel at that moment the adder's sharp sting, the touch of Clive's warm lips upon her arm. She shook from head to foot, and a storm of passionate grief whirled across her soul. With a cry of anguish she threw her arms above her head and flung herself face downward upon the very spot on which he had knelt. Her whole frame was shaken with sobs, and the tears, which had come at last, rained down her white cheeks.

* * * * *

She came back weak and exhausted; but the agony of weep-

ing had brought relief, and she ate some food, and slept that night better than she had slept since her father's death.

On the following Sunday she was in her accustomed place at the organ, and played with her usual skill and feeling. She noticed, for the first time, that the small choir which her father and she had taught with such loving care, had grown, in the absence of her leading voice, somewhat wild and careless; it distressed her in a vague way as she thought how much it would have distressed him, and half absently she raised her voice, and sang for the first time since her father's death. The congregation was startled; but no one, even of those who knew her, was more affected by the sweet, clear voice than a stranger who was seated in one of the high-backed pews at the end of the church. He was a tall, thin, foreign-looking man, with white hair falling loosely on the collar of a capacious cloak which he wore closely round him, though the day was warm. He had driven over with his valet from Lynmouth, and the Trentishoe people had eyed him curiously as he limped up the path, leaning on his servant's arm. He had neither knelt nor stood up during the service, but had leant back, looking straight before him from under thick, white brows.

As Beryl's voice rose above the rest and its exquisite music filled the little church, a look of surprise, followed by a spasm of pain, had crossed his face; his hands, long and thin, and covered by white kid gloves, closed over the crooked stick on which he leant, and his lips twitched as if with emotion.

He waited in the church until Beryl had finished the voluntary, then, as his man led him out, he said:

"Stephano, find out for me who was singing; it was a woman. I will wait here."

He seated himself in the porch and leant on his stick, his eyes fixed on the ground.

The valet went back into the church to enquire of Saunders—just as Patsy Pryde had enquired—and while he was gone, Beryl, thinking every one had left the church, came down the stairs from the organ loft and was passing out. She saw the strange-looking man seated in the porch, and she paused a moment. He looked up, and their eyes met; his face grew white, and his lips twitched as they had twitched when he had heard her voice, and the stick fell from his hands, with a clatter, on the stones.

Beryl stooped and picked it up, and held it out to him. His hands trembled as he took it, and his lips moved, but no sound came for a moment; then, as if he had succeeded by a great effort in recovering his composure, he said, with a strong

foreign accent, as he raised his hat with all a foreigner's courtesy:

"I thank you!"

Beryl dropped her veil and walked on; the valet came out.

"It was a young lady, your highness."

"I know. I have seen her," said his master. "What is her name?"

"Beryl Frayne, your highness," replied the man.

The gentleman made no remark, but looked straight before him, his thin lips set tightly. He sat thus and quite motionless for a minute or so, then he rose, took his servant's arm, and went slowly down the path.

CHAPTER XXIII.

BERYL had forgotten the white-haired foreigner whom she had left in the porch before she had reached home; but the next day she saw him again. He was being driven down the valley in a carriage and pair. The equipage was very plain, but it was handsomely appointed; the horses were of the best, the servants on the box were in sober but foreign-looking livery.

The gentleman, leaning back in the carriage, with his capacious cloak wrapped round him, and his gloved hands clasped on his gold-headed stick, had an air of distinction which attracted Beryl's attention. As the carriage passed, the servant, who was sitting on the seat opposite his master, bent forward and said something, and the gentleman, whose eyes had been bent on the ground, raised them quickly, looked at the girl, and lifted his hat.

Beryl met the gaze of the dark eyes with a faint surprise; for she had not expected any sign of recognition from him; but she inclined her head slightly, and the carriage rolled by. For a moment or two she wondered who he might be; then her thoughts returned to their usual channel, and she was so absorbed in them that she did not notice the doctor's old gig coming up behind her. It stopped beside her, and the doctor leant forward and gave her "good-morning;" then, as his keen, shrewd eyes scanned her face, the smile left his own, and he got down from the gig.

"I'll walk a little while with you, my dear," he said. "I've been riding all the morning, and my old bones are rather stiff. I haven't seen you for the last week or two. How are you getting on?"

"I'm quite well, Doctor Bond," answered Beryl.

"How long is it since you've taken to telling untruths, my dear?" he asked, with a smile.

Beryl looked at him; but was not very much astonished, for she knew his peculiar ways.

"Isn't that rather rude, doctor?" she retorted, with a faint smile on her wan face.

"It is necessary to be rude sometimes, my dear," he said, with his grey head on one side, like that of a knowing old bird. "The truth is generally rude. You're not at all well—anything but well."

"The weather is still hot," began Beryl, apologetically.

"And how long have you begun to complain of the heat?" he demanded. "You used to mind it as little as a salamander. Give me your hand."

"There is nothing the matter with me," said Beryl; but she held out her hand, and he took her pulse.

"Humph!" he grunted. "Low, far too low. Do you eat? But of course you don't. And you don't go anywhere. And you sit and fret, and fret; in fact, you're trying hard to kill yourself. Suicide, my dear, is still considered a crime by civilised people."

"I'm not going to die, doctor," said Beryl, with a smile that had more sadness than mirth in it. "I am very strong, as you know; and I shall get well and robust when the cool weather comes."

"Will you?" he said. He still held her hand, and he turned up the sleeve. "That adder bite hasn't left any mark," he observed. "By-the-way, what has become of the amateur surgeon, the young man called Barle or Carle; what was it?"

"Marle," corrected Beryl, trying to speak the name steadily, and meeting his sharp eyes unflinchingly; but he saw her lips trembling. "He has left Trentishoe; he has gone back to London."

"Humph!" grunted the doctor again. "A fine young fellow, and plucky to boot. I should like to see him again. I'll send you a tonic, and mind you take it. Don't water the flowers with it, as you used to do with the medicine I sent you when you were a child. Dear me! that doesn't seem very long ago; and here you are a tall, beautiful young woman—trying to kill yourself. You mustn't do that, my dear; life has some good things in store for you yet, believe me. Did you notice the carriage that just passed us?" he broke off abruptly.

"Yes," said Beryl, glad to change the subject. "I saw the gentleman in church last Sunday. Who is he?"

"He is quite an exalted individual," replied the doctor. "He is an Italian prince—Prince Carasca. He is staying at the Vale Hotel; has taken the whole house, and lives there like—like a prince; in fact, with a retinue of servants, and a host of carriages and horses. Singular-looking man, isn't he? Well, I must go on my weary way, my dear. That's just it," he added, looking at her with meaning in his sharp but kindly eyes; "we all have to go on our weary way, but it's our duty to make it as little weary as possible. There's a sermon for you, as well as the tonic I'm going to send."

"I will take them both gratefully, doctor," said Beryl in her sweet voice.

He pressed her hand and patted her on the shoulder.

"That's a good girl," he said, very gently; and he waved his hand to her as he was driven off.

The tonic arrived, and Beryl took it dutifully; but it did not seem to do her very much good. Even Doctor Bond, clever as he was, could not minister to a mind diseased; and when he met her, a few days later, he saw that his prescription had failed.

"What you want is a change, my dear," he told her; "you'll have to leave this place."

Beryl smiled and shook her head.

"I could not do that, doctor," she said. "There is the organ, and I'm going to get some pupils."

"There are organs and pupils in other places than Trentishoe," he returned; "but I can't stop and argue with you now; I am going into Lynmouth to see Prince Carasca, who has done me the honour to send for me."

"I am sorry he is ill," said Beryl.

"Ah, well, people must be ill, or doctors would die, my dear," he retorted, with an affectation of cynicism; an affectation only, for he was one of the kindest of men, and he worried himself about Beryl all the way to Lynmouth.

When he arrived at the Vale Hotel, Stephano, the prince's valet, was awaiting him in the hall.

"Yes, I am Doctor Bond," said the doctor. "The prince has sent for me, I believe?"

"No, sir," answered Stephano; "it is the princess."

"The prince's wife?" queried the doctor.

"No, sir; her highness is the prince's sister."

"Well, which of them is ill?" asked the doctor, abruptly.

"The prince," replied Stephano. "Will you have the extreme goodness to step this way?"

The doctor had the extreme goodness to follow the valet up the stairs to a small room on the first floor. It had been elegantly refurnished, and from one of the satin chairs a very little old lady rose and bowed in a stately fashion.

"My brother, the prince, is ill, doctor," she said. "And I desire that you should see him; but he does not know that I have sent for you; he has a—a prejudice against gentlemen of your profession."

"Not at all uncommon, madame," answered the old doctor; "most persons have; they never want us till they *do* want us, as the Irishman says. What is the matter with him?"

"My brother is not strong," said the princess. "He came to England for the benefit of his health, and we had hoped that your bracing air"—she gave a little shudder—"had benefited him; but during the last week he has not been so well. He does not complain, but he—is—how do you say it?—moody and low-spirited. He is, as you say, depressed, and does not eat nor sleep. But you shall see him." With her hand on the handle of the door of the adjoining room, she paused and said, rather timidly: "You will not mind, sir, if my brother should be a little—how do you say it?—a little brusque?"

"Not at all, madame," said the doctor, cheerfully; "I'm a little brusque myself."

She opened the door, and he entered.

"This gentleman is a doctor. I have sent for him. You will see him, Carasca?"

The prince was lying back in a saddle-bag chair beside the fire; the room was hot, though well ventilated, and a fur was stretched across the prince's knees. He rose with a frown and a lifting of his thick white eyebrows, but bowed to the doctor with all a prince's courtesy.

"My sister magnifies a slight ailment, a mere lassitude, into an illness, doctor," he said. "But pray be seated."

The little doctor drew his chair up and scanned the princely countenance as coolly and as keenly as he would have examined the face of any sick cottager; for he was no respecter of persons, and a sick prince was to him just a sick man, and no more.

"No ailments are slight at our age, prince," he said.

"What is the matter with you?"

"Nothing," replied the prince, "except it be life itself."

"That's rather a serious disease sometimes," remarked the doctor. "But a prince ought to find life bearable enough. I don't know, though; it all depends."

"Yes, it all depends," said the prince, with a grim smile.

His English was perfect, though he spoke it with a slight foreign accent. It was evident that the doctor's brusque manner did not offend his highness; perhaps the servility with which he was usually treated made one of the wearinesses of his life.

"Yes, it all depends," echoed the doctor. "We've all of us got to carry our burden, and it's none the lighter for being wrapped in silk or cloth of gold."

"You are a philosopher, doctor, I perceive," said the prince.

"No; I'm only a country doctor who has grown old watching the humours and vagaries of his fellow-men, and patching up their bodies—when I could."

"And you want to patch mine?" asked the prince.

"I'll try, if you like," responded the doctor, coolly.

"Will you open your waistcoat, or shall I call your man?"

"Do not trouble," said the prince; and he threw aside his cloak and unbuttoned his vest.

"Do you feel cold? The room's hot, and you're wrapped up as if for winter."

"I am seldom or never warm," answered the other.

The doctor sounded his patient's heart, and sat down again, with a grunt.

"I need scarcely ask you to tell me the truth," said the prince, languidly.

"No; men of our age ought to be able to bear the truth," rejoined the doctor, cheerfully. "Heart's weak, very weak. Rather surprising if it were not, seeing that you have used it pretty hard, I should say," he added, as he scanned the still handsome face, with its delicate lines and waxen hue.

"Yes, I have lived," said the prince, quietly. "Until these last few years, I have lived every hour."

"So I should have thought," returned the medical man, coolly. "Did you ever hear Bunsen's favourite theory? His idea was that the Creator gave every man a certain number of heart-beats. Some men run through them quickly; others make 'em spin out. Original, but interesting."

"Very," assented Carasca. "I have run through mine quickly, at express speed; and I presume, therefore, they are falling short, coming to an end?"

"Don't know," said the doctor. "'While there's life

there's hope.' Trite, but true. I won't send you any medicine. There's none that I know of that would do you the least good. But here's my advice: avoid excitement. You have had some lately, haven't you?"

A faint color tinged the waxen face for a moment, and the prince frowned, but remained silent.

"Go back to Italy."

"A famous doctor sent me here," observed the prince.

"The famous doctor was an ass! Most of us are. It was evident he didn't know anything about this charming climate of ours. It's hot one day and cold the next, which means chills, and that's bad for a man in your condition. There are plenty of places in Italy with a bracing air."

"I have a palace on the hills above the Lake Pelagio."

"Don't know it," said Bond; "but if it's high and dry, and the palace is well drained and ventilated, you would be a great deal better off there than here. I am sorry to lose so illustrious a patient so quickly, but I advise you to go to your palace on lake what-you-may-call-it as soon as possible. There's nothing to keep you here, I suppose?"

Carasca hesitated for a moment or two; then he said, with a sigh:

"No. I thank you for your advice, doctor, the sincerity and disinterestedness of which are evident."

He rose and went to a bureau and wrote a cheque, and, with a princely inclination of the head, extended it to the doctor.

The little man took it, and made a grimace.

"This is far too much, prince," he said. "A guinea is my fee, and I don't often get that."

"All the more reason that you should accept this small token of my gratitude and respect for your honesty," said the prince, with a gracious smile.

"Small!" exclaimed the doctor, with a grunt. "Well, thanks very much. It's pleasant to give advice which one knows one's patient can follow. It's a great trial to a doctor—one of his greatest trials—to be obliged to order beef tea and port wine and change of air to people who can't afford them."

"You have often to do that, I fear," said Carasca.

"Yes," replied Bond, with a sigh and shrug of his shoulders. "Very often, prince. Just met with such a case this morning. One of the dearest and sweetest girls in the world, who is pining away in one of the valleys here. Nothing but change of air and scene will save her, as I told her."

"And she cannot go?" asked the prince, with a polite affectation of interest.

"No. She's an orphan, and poor; gets her living in the place; hasn't any friends anywhere else; wouldn't let any friend help her; proud. Now, if I could send her, as easily as I send you, to that palace on lake what-you-may-call-it, she would soon forget her troubles, and pull round. But I can't; and I'm afraid she'll—go out. This is just a case in point."

He got his hat and extended his hand, just as he would have done to one of his poorest patients, and quite oblivious of the point of etiquette which demanded that the prince should be the first to extend his.

But his highness did not appear to notice the breach of etiquette, and shook the wrinkled paw which had healed so many wounds and smoothed so many pillows, had brought so many human beings into life, and led—with what gentleness!—so many through the Valley of the Shadow of Death.

"Your case interests me, doctor," he observed. "May one enquire the young lady's name?"

The doctor turned on his way to the door.

"Well, one may enquire," he replied, pursing his lips and shaking his head; "but we doctors never mention names, and Miss Frayne would be the last—" He stopped, with an air of discomfiture at his slip, so intense as to be almost comical. "There, I've blurted it out!"

The prince had sunk into his chair, and he leant back with his hand supporting his chin, his dark eyes fixed on the doctor's chagrined face.

"Miss Frayne," he said, very slowly and very quietly. "I have heard of her. She is the young girl who plays and sings in the village church?"

Bond nodded.

"You've heard nothing but good of her, I'm sure, prince," he declared, a touch of feeling penetrating through the thin cover of his brusqueness. "Some of us are born to trouble, some of us achieve it, and others have it thrust upon them. She belongs to the last class. The poor child has lived here nearly all her life, alone with her father. He was blind; a musician—a good one, I believe, though I don't know much about it. Can't tell 'God Save the Queen' from 'Pop Goes the Weasel' when I hear 'em. He died a few weeks ago, and the poor girl is left alone in the world."

The prince screened his eyes with his long thin hand.

"Quite alone?" he asked. "Is there no mother?"

"No; dead—dead before Sebastian Frayne and the child

came here. Being motherless and quite alone, she feels her father's death more than she would have done under the usual circumstances. Everything here reminds her of him; and the place isn't exactly suited to a girl in her condition. She's not strong enough for work. What she wants is change and rest. But I beg your pardon, prince."

"Not at all," said Prince Carasca, with a slight wave of his white hand. "I am interested. This young lady, will she not accept assistance? There must be many among her friends who would gladly supply the means—"

The doctor shook his head.

"No. She happens to be a lady, and proud into the bargain. I wish you good-day, prince."

Carasca held up his hand.

"Pardon! One moment. This young girl—Miss Frayne, you call her?—it would appear is not too proud to work?"

"Your true lady never is," said Bond, laconically. "Plays the organ. Going to take pupils."

"Which is work too hard and exacting for a delicate girl," interjected the prince. He was silent for a moment or two; then he said, with a manner and in a tone which, for the first time during the interview, indicated his rank: "An idea has just occurred to me, doctor. You say that your young friend would recover her health if she were at my palace on Pelagio. If she please, she shall go there."

The doctor looked at him with astonishment for a moment, then he shook his head.

"Very kind of you, prince," he said. "Very kind of you, and as one of Miss Frayne's oldest friends, I thank you; but I am afraid it can scarcely be managed. Miss Frayne would not accept an invitation, however pressingly proffered, from strangers. She is independent."

"Let her remain so," replied Carasca, with a touch of *hauteur*. "I offer Miss Frayne the post of secretary to my sister, the Princess Pauline, and myself. If she accepts, she will accompany us to Pelagio, whither we proceed without delay. She will be paid the salary which is usually paid to persons occupying the position which she will take. There is no charity in this proposal; her pride need not suffer in any way. Wait, if you please." He raised his hand with princely dignity. "You will be good enough to convey my offer to Miss Frayne at your earliest convenience. If she should accept, my sister, the Princess Pauline, will see her and make all necessary arrangements."

He sank back as if he had said all he intended to say and desired the interview should be closed.

The doctor bowed.

"I will take your offer to Miss Frayne, prince," he said.

"And I sincerely trust she will accept it."

"I thank you," responded Carasca, with princely simplicity.

The good old doctor withdrew. As the door closed behind him, the prince rose and leant against the mantelshelf, trembling in every limb. A deep sigh burst from him as he let his head fall into his hands.

CHAPTER XXIV.

At first, Beryl refused the prince's offer.

"It is charity under a mask," she said. "How could such a great man have need of such poor services as I could render? Besides, I do not want to leave Trentishoe."

"Which proves that you ought to leave it," replied the doctor. He had made up his mind that she should go to the palace above Pelagio, and he argued with her almost daily, and the vicar and other friends helped him, and brought that affectionate pressure to bear which is so difficult to resist.

"You'd better let me take your acceptance to the prince, my dear," said Doctor Bond. "And without any further waste of time—you're wasting a lot of mine now, you know."

"I am sorry," answered Beryl. "But why don't you let me alone, doctor?"

"Because I hate attending funerals, and I shall have to attend yours if you remain here much longer."

They were sitting on the terrace on this particular visit, and he pulled out a bundle of papers as he looked at her squarely and stubbornly.

"See here, my dear, I've been making enquiries about Prince Carasca and his belongings—I felt it my duty to do so, because it was through me that the offer was made—and I am glad to say that everything is satisfactory. The prince is related to the reigning house, and is a great favourite at Court. He leads an exemplary life—whatever he may have done in his youth—and his sister, the Princess Pauline, is known throughout Italy for her goodness and charity. I am quite sure you would be very happy with her."

Beryl stifled a sigh. "Happy!" The word seemed a mockery.

"Carasca is immensely rich: he has estates and palaces in

various parts of Italy, and he is as generous and charitable as his sister. But, mind, it isn't charity he offers you; you will have to work for your living. He knows that you used to manage your father's affairs; that you speak French very well and Italian fairly; you will soon perfect yourself in the latter. You will have to conduct his correspondence, and help the princess in her charitable work. They are both passionately fond of music—all Italians are—and here, again, you can render them service. Of course, you will be a dependant, but so is every person who earns his living; he must be dependent on an individual or the public. Frankly, it is a splendid chance for you; and there are not too many chances in this world, and frankly again, there are not many things you are fitted for or would like. For instance, you would not like to go on the stage?"

Beryl shook her head.

"Just so. By-the-way, what has become of that opera of your father's?"

"I have stopped it," replied Beryl in a low voice. "It was a light opera, and—it would have been like dancing on his grave!"

"Yes—yes; I understand. Some time in the future, perhaps. But now, my dear, for your answer. The prince leaves England almost immediately. Just consider, not only I, but all your friends here, consider that you ought to accept. God knows, we shall be sorry to lose you, and I for one shall miss you very badly. But you won't go away from us forever, Beryl. You can come back and see us. Come, my dear! I am going to see the prince this afternoon; let me say that you accept his offer."

Beryl's hands were clasped tightly in her lap, and her brows were drawn straight, as she looked dreamily and with a troubled expression across the valley. We are told that Hope springs eternal in the human breast; and, though she scarcely knew it and would not have admitted it, a faint hope had lingered in her bosom that Olive would write to her; perhaps seek her to offer some explanation, perhaps to plead for pardon. Day by day the hope had sprung up afresh, only to wither and die before evening. But he had not written or sought her, and his silence was an admission of his guilt. In leaving Trentishoe, the place which his love had made sacred, she would be breaking the last link of the chain which had bound her to him; perhaps it would be as well that this last link should be broken.

"I will go," she said, at last.

The doctor rose briskly from his chair and patted her on the shoulder.

"Good girl! I knew you would listen to reason. I am sure you are doing the right thing."

He came back in the evening radiant and self-satisfied.

"The prince and his suite leave England the day after tomorrow, my dear," he said. "He is too great a personage to travel in the ordinary way, and he has wired for his yacht, which will leave Plymouth on Monday evening. I had a little conversation with Mr. Stephano, who informed me that the aforesaid yacht is a floating palace. You will have your own state-rooms, and I think you will enjoy the voyage; at any rate, it will do you good."

Beryl started.

"So soon!" she breathed.

"About this house?" said the doctor. "It belongs to you. We will try and let it."

"No, no," said Beryl, wincing. "Not yet; I may want to come back. Can I not keep it as it is a little while?"

"As long as you please, my dear," he replied. "The Saunders can remain as caretakers; and I'll look in occasionally and see that things are going on all right."

Beryl tried to thank him, but the words would not come; but the tears were in her eyes, and she held out her hand to him.

It was her last Sunday at Trentishoe, in the Enchanted Valley, and she played and sang as she had never played and sung before. It seemed to her, as the music of the voluntary floated through the little church, that it voiced her farewell; and at the last notes her head fell upon her hands, and her tears bedewed the key-board which her father's hands had hallowed.

Doctor Bond took her to Plymouth. A stately yacht lay at its moorings; but neither the doctor nor she noticed its splendour, for the eyes of both were dim as they said "good-bye."

"I can never thank you enough, doctor!" she said, as she gave him her hands. "But you know that I am grateful!"

"I know that you are everything that is good and sweet, my dear," he replied; "and if you want to thank me, be happy. You will write to me?"

She made a motion of assent, for she could not speak, and went on board. The steward conducted her, with profound respect, to her state-room; and there, with her face buried in her hands, she heard the various sounds which indicate the departure of a vessel.

About half an hour afterward there came a rather timid knock at the door, and the princess entered.

"I have come to make your acquaintance, my dear," she said, in her broken English. "I am afraid you feel very lonely and sad at leaving your native land; one always is. But I hope you will be happy with us. My brother, the prince, bade me convey his respects and ask you if there was anything you wanted, if there was anything we could do to make you more comfortable."

"Oh, no, thank you," answered Beryl, glancing round the luxurious state-room. "There is nothing; how could there be? I am very grateful. Is there anything I can do?"

"Nothing, nothing, my dear," said the princess. "You are sure you are comfortable?" She looked round. "They have not put in the piano, I see. You are fond of music, I know. I will see that it is put in. Dinner will be served to you here to-night; you will prefer it. There is a bell, you see; you will ring for anything you want. Here comes your maid, and I will leave you now. Do not weep, dear child; you are among friends."

She went as timidly and as softly as she had come; and Beryl, struggling with her tears, helped the maid unpack her things.

Her sleeping-cabin was as luxurious as her state-room; but she slept little that night, and in the early morning she went on deck.

Carasca was seated in a deck-chair, his cloak round him, the costly fur over his knees. He rose at sight of her, and removed his travelling-cap, his dark eyes rested on her with an inscrutable expression.

"You are up early, Miss Frayne," he said; "but you are wise. Sit here beside me. Or would you prefer to walk the deck?"

Beryl sat down in the chair near him, and looked round with a dull interest, and the prince's eyes rested on her with grave scrutiny.

Beryl had never seen anything like the yacht: and its snowy deck, the perfect order of every rope and sail, the spotless linen of the sailors, the gleam of every bit of metal, astonished her. It looked like a rich man's toy, rather than a serviceable, sea-going vessel. As Stephano had said, it was a floating palace.

The prince was silent for some minutes, then he talked to her with all the ease and graciousness which a man of his rank can so easily display to a girl in her position. He told

her the name of the captain and the other officers, pointed out the landmarks by which they were scudding as if on the wings of a bird, and in a very little while he had succeeded in wooing her, so to speak, from her sense of loneliness; so that presently Beryl found herself smiling at the antics of a pet monkey, which played upon the deck and scampered up the rigging.

The breakfast-bell rang, and Stephano came forward to offer his arm to his master. The principal saloon, in which the meals were served, was magnificent and even regal in its appointments. Beryl sat next the princess, and both she and the prince treated her not only as a friend and guest, but as a favoured one.

After the breakfast was over, the princess took Beryl to her own cabin. Beryl noticed that the suite of rooms was not larger nor more luxuriously furnished than hers.

"You will come here, my dear," said the princess, "whenever you feel lonely and need society—how do you say it?—company; and I shall be always glad to see you. I am afraid you will feel it rather *triste*—how do you call it?—dull; for my brother is an invalid, and I—well, you see, I am quite an old person. But you must try not to be—what is the word?—homesick."

Beryl tried to thank her, but the other gently waved the thanks aside.

"I have heard from the good doctor—how good and how clever he is!—that you have suffered a great sorrow. Ah, my dear child, we have all of us suffered a great sorrow! But time heals everything, and it will heal yours. You are fond of reading—yes? I will send you some of my books. And now you shall go and lie down during the heat of the day."

Beryl forced a smile.

"It is quite cool here on the sea, princess," she said; "and I do not want to lie down. Is there nothing I can do?"

"Do?" repeated the princess, and she looked round rather helplessly. "What is there you should do but amuse yourself?"

Beryl found herself smiling.

"I am the prince's secretary, and yours," she said, suggestively.

"Ah, yes; that is true," assented the little lady. "But my brother and I, we do not write letters on board ship. Ah, be satisfied; you will find plenty of work presently, believe me. You will go now and rest."

Beryl would have been better pleased if she had had some-

thing to do; but she went to her cabin and wrote a letter to the good doctor.

At eight o'clock the dinner-bell rang.

She had put on a plain evening-dress, black, of course, and the princess greeted her with an affectionate and admiring smile as she entered the saloon.

The dinner was an elaborate one, and for the first time for many dreary weeks Beryl felt inclined to eat.

When the dinner was over, she arose, after the princess, and said, with a slight flush:

"Shall I play—or sing?"

As a matter of fact, she felt that she must do something to justify her presence on this floating palace.

Carasca looked up without a word, but his sister said, timidly:

"If you will, my child."

Beryl went to the piano and played a nocturne of Chopin's. The princess murmured her thanks.

"You play like a musician, my dear," she said.

Beryl played the prelude of one of her father's songs, and sang it.

As the sweet voice floated through the saloon, the princess shaded her eyes with her hand, and when it died away, she said:

"You sing like an angel, my dear."

But the prince said nothing, and presently he signed to Stephano to help him on deck.

As this day had passed, so passed the others of the voyage. It was all luxury, and ease, and rest, and peace. Beryl was treated as an equal and friend, rather than as a dependant.

She sang each night, and practised in the morning, or she walked the deck or sat in a lounge chair in the bow, gazing at the crested waves as the vessel cleft her way through them.

The weather was fine, though there was plenty of wind.

In the Bay of Biscay the yacht pitched and tossed, and for two or three days Beryl was ill, and the Princess Pauline nursed her as a mother might have done; but she soon recovered when they sailed into smoother water.

As the doctor had prophesied, the voyage had done her an immense amount of good. Her face was no longer pallid, and something of the old brightness shone in the violet eyes. Once or twice she had caught herself laughing at the broken English of the princess, the antics of the monkey, or some remark of the captain, who was a humourist in his way, and

lost no opportunity of paying blunt but delicate attention to the young English girl.

Indeed, Beryl had made friends, so to speak, of every one on board; and when she played and sang in the evening, the crew collected as near as possible to the dome of the saloon; and once or twice there had sounded something like a faint and timid applause.

The princess had grown very fond of her, and when Beryl was below deck she spent most of her time in the great lady's state-room.

With the prince, Beryl had little to do. He conversed with her at meal-times and when they chanced to meet on deck; but she often met his eyes resting on her with a regard half grave, half sad and wistful. He was always kindness itself to her.

They sailed into port, and there Beryl began to realise the rank and status of Carasca. A deputation came on board to greet him, and accorded to him the welcome which is usually reserved for royalty.

Flags were flying in the streets, and a guard of honour was stationed on the quay. A special train awaited them, and the station-master, bare-headed, and with obsequious bows, ushered them into the saloon carriage.

The train took them to a small private station on the border of the lake, whence a carriage conveyed them to the palace.

It was a magnificent building of white stone, which gleamed like marble in the rays of the sunset, and Beryl could scarcely withdraw her eyes from it.

As the carriage pulled up at the bottom of a wide stretch of steps leading to a terrace which ran along the whole façade, a number of servants came down to receive them, and a flag was run up over one of the turrets of the palace.

The vast place, shining whitely amidst the trees, the servants in their rich livery, the splendour of the whole place, bewildered Beryl; but she was still more astonished at the magnificence of the interior of the palace. The vast hall which they entered was of vari-coloured marble; statues gleamed brightly amidst overhanging palms; here and there the severity of the stone was broken by rich hangings partly masking carved doors. A flight of stairs, of purest marble, led to a wide corridor, upon which opened the *boudoirs* and bedrooms. It was a vision of the "Arabian Nights," and Beryl stood and looked round her in speechless amazement.

But upon the prince and princess the beauty and splendour

of the place seemed to have no effect. Carasca passed upstairs on Stephano's arm with his usual listless gravity, and his sister Pauline yawned as she dropped into a chair in the hall and signed to Beryl to take another.

"We will take some tea, shall we not, before we take another step?" she said. "Your English tea, it is a good institution, my child."

A ridiculous number of servants brought the tea. One, with stately slowness, carried the salver of massive silver, a second brought the teapot of costly porcelain, a third appeared with bread and butter, and a fourth brought up the rear with some tea-cakes, which were intended to imitate those which one sees in every English home; and these and other servants stood around, motionless as statues, but observant as slaves, while the princess and Beryl drank their "English tea." The princess set down her cup with a sigh.

"Now we will go upstairs to your rooms, my dear," she said.

As if they had been listening, a couple of maids dressed in black, with white caps, having a small rosette of yellow—the Carasca colour and badge—came forward and led the way.

"These are your rooms, my child," said Pauline, as one of the maids opened the door on the corridor; and Beryl entered and looked round her with an astonishment compared with which her former surprise was poor indeed.

The rooms were vast, the appointments rich and costly in the extreme; the luxury on board the yacht had not prepared her for anything like this.

"These are mine?" she asked, shyly. "There—there must be some mistake!"

Indeed, she did not know what to say.

The princess smiled and stifled a yawn.

"But no," she said; "these rooms are yours, my child. I hope they will not be too cold; they face south; it was my brother's wish that you should have them. *Ay de mi!* how weary I am! And you must be exhausted, poor child! We will rest, will we not, until the bell rings? Your maid will show you the way to the dining-hall."

Beryl sank into a chair, and, looking round her, tried to realise that she was Beryl Frayne, and that she was not dreaming that she was a princess who had been carried by some genii into this palace of the "Arabian Nights." Her maid came and helped her to dress, and as the bell rang she went down the marble stairs.

The prince, leaning on his stick, was crossing the hall.

princess ate but little, and scarcely a dish would have been touched had not Beryl's appetite reasserted itself. The servants waited with noiseless precision and assiduity; Pauline and Beryl conversed; but Carasca grew silent, and leant back in his chair, as if lost in thought. Every now and then, however, he took the wine or a dish of fruit from the butler, and himself offered them to Beryl, who sat on his right.

Presently the princess rose, and the two ladies went into the third salon, or drawing-room. The walls were draped with tapestry, the faded figures of which glowed with dim splendour in the soft light of the wax candles, burning in ormolu candelabra. The furniture was of white and gold, and there were innumerable *bris-à-brac*, statuettes, costly vases, Indian cabinets, and pictures by modern masters. An Erard grand stood in the corner, and a harp was near it. The princess led the way into the palm-house, and Beryl looked round her in wondering admiration. At that moment she could not help thinking of some of the two-roomed cottages in her beloved Devonshire, and asking herself why Heaven had decreed such terrible contrasts as that which this imperial palace and those hovels she knew so well afforded.

"This is my favourite place," remarked the princess. "I come here and read, or sit and dream, when the weather is not too hot; but, indeed, it is almost always cool here. You must come here whenever you feel *triste* and dull."

"I hope I shall have too much to do to feel *triste* very often," said Beryl, intending her reply as a hint that she desired to commence her work.

The Princess Pauline shrugged her shoulders. "There is plenty of time, *ma belle*," she said. "You English are always so energetic; you are never happy unless you are at work, work, work! I noticed that in England; it was always—what do you call it?—bustle, bustle. You take life so seriously. But we Italians are different; if the sun shines, and the wind blows from the south, we are content to lie on our backs and thank God for the warmth and the repose. We are satisfied."

"But one must earn one's living, princess," said Beryl.

"Living," echoed Pauline, raising her eyebrows. "If one has a melon for the hot weather, and a slice of bread; or a basin of soup, also with a slice of bread, in the winter, one is content."

"There was more than a melon and a slice of bread for dinner to-night, princess," said Beryl, with her English shrewdness.

The princess laughed softly at the retort.

"Because it is the custom to have many dishes set before one. One does not eat them; they go to the servants, who also, perhaps, do not eat them; and so they go to the pigs. Who knows? But why are you in such a great hurry for work? You have been ill, and are not quite strong yet; though, indeed, I think you are better; there is a little colour in your face, and something of brightness in your eyes; that colour which we Italians admire in you English. You will be quite strong presently, and then, ah, then, it will be time enough to speak of your beloved work."

"But I am quite strong now, princess," said Beryl.

"Surely, there must be something I can do."

"Ah, yes," assented Pauline. "You can live. That is a good thing to do for one who is so young and charming. Do you not know that it is a pleasure for me—and my brother, the prince—to have you near us? We have no children, and you, my child, will seem to us like our own little one. But you are not so little; you are so tall, and so much like a woman, though you are but a girl."

"The prince is not married?" asked Beryl. She did not know if he were a widower or not; indeed, she knew so little of her patron and patroness.

The bright little face of the princess clouded over.

"No; Carasca never married. It is a pity—it is strange, you will say? He might have married where he chose; there were many women— But he has not done so. There was something in his life when he was a young man of which I do not know, though I have heard rumours. I was at my convent. I think it was a love affair; I do not know; but, whatever it was, it affected — what do you say? — influenced all his life. From a gay-hearted youth, he became a gloomy man. Women had no charm for him; it seemed that his heart was dead. He immersed himself in the affairs of the State. He is related to the king; his family has been of great service to the present dynasty, and Carasca is—what do you call it?—a great power at Court. The king follows his advice in all things, and is always grateful to him for all that he has done. My brother should be a happy man, but he is what you see him. But you have noticed? You English are so quick."

"Yes; I have noticed that the prince seems sad and preoccupied," said Beryl.

"But he has been better since you have been with us," remarked the princess. "Your presence has cheered and

entertained him, and if that were all the work you were to do, it would be enough."

"For you, princess, not for me," replied Beryl.

Pauline laughed and shrugged her shoulders.

"Ah, you would still be doing something? Then come and play to me, and sing with that sweet voice, which has no equal even in this Italy of ours, where good voices are as thick as—what do you say?—as blackberries."

Beryl went to the piano, and began to sing.

As she sang, the outlines of the magnificent room grew dim in her eyes, and she was back at Hill Cote, with Clive by her side, his adoring eyes fixed on her face, his murmured words of thanks, full of love's music, sweeter than her own, in her ears. Her eyes filled with tears. The prince entered the salon. He held some letters and papers in his hand.

"'Abandon rest, all ye who enter here,' " he said, with a weary smile. "They are not long in discovering that I have arrived; see!" he held out the letters to the princess.

Beryl rose. Now was the time to demand work.

"Can I not help you, prince?" she asked, amazed at her own temerity, and feeling that she was blushing.

Carasca looked at her with faint surprise, then, as if remembering the terms of their agreement, he said:

"I thank you. Will you come into the library?"

The princess shrugged her shoulders and smiled.

"You will have some work at last, my child," she said.

"I wish you joy."

Beryl followed the prince into the library. It was a spacious apartment, with its painted ceiling, like the others; but in place of tapestry or painted panel, it was lined with books. The furniture was of black oak in the English fashion, and an English-like fire of huge logs burned brightly in the vast fireplace. Beryl felt more at home there than she had felt in the gilded salon. Carasca motioned her to a chair, and himself sank into one by the fire.

"You seem determined to remind me that you are my secretary, Miss Frayne," he said.

"Am I not, prince?" asked Beryl. "I'm afraid I shall prove a very inefficient one."

"I think not; we shall see. These letters, will you answer them? Some are English, some are Italian; I will translate the latter if you wish."

Beryl drew her chair to the table and selected a pen. She felt nervous, but she fought for self-possession. After all, she was only to do what she had so often done for her father; the

prince was kind, and he would be patient and bear with her shortcomings.

He read the first Italian letter. It was from the chancellor, and it treated of State matters of an importance which startled Beryl. Carasca dictated an answer, courteous but concise, and Beryl wrote it. The next related to one of his estates, and he tossed it aside for future consideration. The one which followed was in English, and was written by a man named Paretta. It asked for a concession in connection with the navy, over which the prince had some control.

"What shall I say to this, prince?" asked Beryl.

Carasca shrugged his shoulders as if undecided as to his reply.

"It comes from a well-known financier," he said. "He is a man of great wealth and industry. This is not the first application I have had from him, but I am not sure as to what my answer should be. I do not know whether I can trust him. I am aware that he will make a large profit by the transaction; but I am not so sure that his contract will be of service to the State."

"Then shall I say that you will consider the matter, prince?" asked Beryl.

"If you please," he replied. "I know that, for all his wealth, he is what you call an adventurer. I met him in London, where he made personal application for this same concession. Yes; say that I will consider the matter."

He discussed other letters with her and dictated the replies; but, in every case, he appeared to take her judgment into consideration, and, throughout the interview, he treated her with a courtesy and deference which, it is to be feared, the ordinary secretary does not often receive.

"That is all," he said, at last.

"You will sign the letters, prince?" asked Beryl. He went to the table and signed, "Carasca."

"You write a clear hand," he said, and his brows grew straight as he looked at her letters. It seemed as if he were looking beyond them, so to speak; as if her handwriting had started him on a train of thought which carried him far from the business in hand.

"I wrote all my father's letters," said Beryl in a low voice.

His thin lips twitched, and he looked up at her sharply.

"Ah, yes," he said, "that accounts for your precision." He sat and looked at her last letter as if he had forgotten her

presence; and Beryl, after standing for some time waiting, said:

"Is there anything else I can do, prince?"

He started and looked at her with a troubled expression, as if he had been communing with the past.

"That is all," he answered, almost sternly.

Beryl returned to the salon, her feeling of satisfaction at having done something to justify her existence in this palace of splendour and luxury tempered by a strange sensation of mystery and unreality. It was difficult for her to realise, as she lay awake in her bed, with its satin hangings, in the splendid apartment which presented so marked a contrast to the little bedroom at Hill Cote, that she who lay there was Beryl Frayne, of Trentishoe; so much had happened since she had stood in the room of the house in St. James's, and had heard the story of Clive's perfidy from the lips of the cowering girl he had deceived and betrayed. It was hard to believe that she was many hundreds of miles away, that he had gone out of her life forever, and that she was no longer his promised wife, but the secretary of Prince Carasca.

CHAPTER XXVI.

For two or three weeks they lived at Pelagio very quietly; there was an occasional visitor, who dined and remained the night, but, as a rule, the prince and princess and Beryl were alone. The life would by some have been considered monotonous, but its quietude and uneventfulness were just what Beryl needed, and her health and spirits improved daily. The air was light and as exhilarating as champagne, the beauty of the place was indescribable; and Beryl, sometimes with the princess, but more often alone, rode or walked about the hills, and sailed on the lake.

She had a great deal of time at her disposal, for Carasca only required her services for an hour or two in the morning. She now wrote all his letters, and her experience as her father's amanuensis enabled her to fill very efficiently the post she had accepted. The prince was astonished at her acuteness, and the promptitude with which she carried out his instructions; but he merely expressed his approval by a bow and a quiet "Thank you; that is exactly what I wish." He treated her with an extreme kindness and with a consideration which made Beryl very grateful. Sometimes, when she looked at him, as she put some question respecting the letter in hand, she would find his eyes fixed upon her with an ex-

pression at once sad and gentle. Now and again he would accompany her and the Princess Pauline in a drive; on these occasions the great carriage, with its complement of servants, was used; but Beryl enjoyed most driving with the pair of Exmoor ponies, and the light phaeton which had been placed at her disposal; the ponies reminded her of home; and, indeed, very often, when she was driving over the hills, she could almost fancy that she was going across her beloved moors, to Moor Path or to Brendon; and then the memory of Clive would become more vivid than usual, and sometimes she would feel the tears gathering in her eyes. Where was he now?

At the landing-place on the lake there were all kinds of boats, with boatmen always in readiness, and often she went down for a row or a sail. By every one about the place she was treated with the utmost respect—a respect which very soon grew into a warmer sentiment, for the Italians are “quick of heart,” as they say of themselves, and the charm of Beryl’s manner soon won their liking. In their excited way, they almost fought for the honour and privilege of serving her; and the boatman or groom who was selected to row or drive her considered himself a happy man. She would lie back in the stern-sheet of the boat as it scudded like a white-winged bird on the bosom of the lake, and with closed eyes live in the past.

She tried to forget the scene in the house in St. James’s, and to remember only that brief period of joy when the man she loved seemed to her all that was good and noble, and worthy of her devotion. She lived on the memory of those few short, happy weeks; of that memory nothing could rob her. She was like a traveller who, footsore and weary, drags himself along a stony road, beneath dull and gloomy skies, but who forgets the pain and toil, the utter weariness of his journey, as he looks back and remembers the sunlit hills, the green pastures, the perfumed flowers of the land which he has left forever behind him. He can never return, the joy from which he is exiled has vanished forever; but the memory remains, a possession which he can hug to his bosom while life lasts.

Notwithstanding that she had at last become secretary in something more than name, her position in the princely household remained as high and enviable. Carasca, as has been said, treated her with the greatest courtesy and a deference which was not only gentle, but, in a way, affectionate; and his sister had come to regard her with a tenderness which

displayed itself in her manner and voice, and in numberless acts of kindness which were almost maternal.

One morning Beryl found, lying on the bureau at which she wrote, an envelope addressed to her in the prince's handwriting. She opened it with some little curiosity, and was amazed to find that it contained notes for a sum equivalent, in English, to a hundred pounds. Carasca entered the room as she was looking at them, and she held them up, with a blush.

"These cannot be for me, prince?" she said.

"They are for you," he replied. "Why not? I propose to pay you that sum every three months. I give it to you now because you may be needing money."

Beryl laid the notes on the table, and tapped them nervously with her forefinger.

"But it is too much!" she said. "I do not know what salary is paid to a person in my position, but I am sure this is far—far too much."

"That is for me to decide," he declared, with a touch of hauteur; then he added, more gently, and a little sadly: "It is strange you should say that, for, as I put the notes in the envelope, I thought it was too little. I should give more to an ordinary secretary. Consider. Your position is one of great responsibility; you are entrusted with secrets of the State"—he laid his hand upon the letters which he had placed upon the table—"but, more than that, your presence here brightens the life of my sister—and myself," he added. "It is difficult to remunerate sunshine. Take up the notes, my child."

It was the first time he had addressed her as his child, and there was something in his tone which went straight to Beryl's heart. She put the notes in her pocket, and, without a word, for she found it difficult to speak, seated herself at the bureau, ready for work. The prince glanced at his letters as he handed them to her, and dictated the replies. Presently, as he gave her one, he smiled, and shrugged his shoulders.

"We are to have a visitor from the Court," he said. "It is Count Hubert, one of the king's—what do you call them in England?—equerries, and a great favourite. The princess will be glad to have him here, for she is very fond of him. He has given us short notice, has he not?"

Beryl looked at the note, which was written with evident haste.

"I think he will be here to-day," she said.

Carasca smiled.

"That is like him," he remarked. "I must tell Pauline at once."

"I will go," said Beryl.

"Ah, no," he replied; "do not disturb yourself. Presently will do; you tire yourself."

Beryl looked round with a smile.

"Why, I do so very little!" she said.

"You do not know how much you do," he responded.

They got through the letters, and Beryl went to inform the princess of the coming visit. She was delighted.

"I am so glad!" she said. "Hubert is the dearest boy, and both the prince and I are extremely fond of him. I think you also will like him, my child; he is always so bright and cheerful; and it is time, indeed, that you saw some one younger and more companionable than two old—what do you say?—fogies."

"I am quite happy, princess," replied Beryl, "and I do not want any other companion than you and the prince, who have treated me so kindly."

"No! What have we done?" demanded the princess.

"Indeed, we are afraid to do anything; you are always so proud. For instance, I have a little present for you which I have desired to give you for ever so many days past, but I have been afraid. You shall come to my room now, and I will give them to you." She drew Beryl's arm within hers, and they went upstairs. Pauline took from a drawer a morocco-covered jewel-case, and placed it almost timidly in Beryl's hand. Beryl opened it, and saw a bracelet and pendant to match; they were set with diamonds and pearls, and, though simple and unostentatious, were, she knew, of great value, and, girl-like, she uttered an exclamation of admiration and pleasure.

"Surely these are not for me, princess?" she said.

"But yes!" responded the princess. "For whom else? I hope you will like them, for I wore them when I was a girl; they are too young for me now. They have been lying unnoticed and neglected in my jewel-box. Do not refuse them, my child; have pity on the poor things, which have not seen the light for so many years; they will be so rejoiced to shine once more on a woman's white neck and arm. Do you not think jewels have some feeling? Ah, yes, I think so; and that they enjoy the light and the music and the laughter; for they are made for them, and were not intended to be hidden away from sight." She spoke lightly to conceal her fear lest Beryl should refuse the gift; and Beryl felt that it would be

ungracious to decline it, costly as it was, and unsuited, as it seemed to her, to so humble a person as herself.

"I will take them very gratefully, princess," she said, "though they are far too rich for one in my position."

"Nothing is too rich for beauty and grace," answered Pauline, evidently gratified by Beryl's acceptance. "You will wear them to-night, and when I see them I shall remember my own youth; though I could not lay claim to the beauty of their present mistress."

Beryl carried them to her room, and put them on when she dressed for dinner. She was out on the lake when the visitor arrived, but she saw two or three strange servants as she passed through the court-yard on her return, and knew that Count Hubert had reached the palace.

When she entered the salon she saw a tall young man standing by the princess's chair. He was remarkably handsome, with a typical Italian face, and dark hair and eyes. There was a bright and boyish look in the latter as he turned them swiftly on Beryl, which at once prepossessed her. He looked very graceful in his evening-dress, relieved by the scarlet ribbon and order, and he straightened himself with a little lithe movement, as if the princess and he had been talking of Beryl, and he were curious to see her.

Pauline made the introduction, and the count bowed, then held out his hand. Beryl had not been prepared for this, her hand was not quite ready, and the young fellow coloured as he took it.

"I beg your pardon!" he said. "I seem too presumptuous? But it is the fashion to shake hands in England, is it not? Forgive me; I have not been there."

He did not wait for her reply, but drew a chair forward, and stood beside her with that indefinable air of deference towards her sex which is more easily learned at Court than anywhere else. He talked in Italian for a minute or two, then he glided into English, which, though occasionally broken, sounded very musical and naïve.

"You will not mind my speaking in your language?" he said. "I am always so glad to have an opportunity of practising; but perhaps it will"—he hesitated a moment, then went on with a triumphant smile—"bore you?"

The princess laughed.

"Do not be afraid, Hubert," she said; "nothing bores Miss Frayne—not even this quiet and monotonous life here."

"Miss Frayne has resources within herself?" he remarked,

with a courteous inclination of his head. "I can well believe it."

The prince entered, ushered by the major-domo, and dinner was served. It was a very bright meal. The young fellow talked all through it. He gave them the latest news from the Court, and was full of anecdotes, and possessed that light humour which few persons, however gloomy, are able to resist. The princess laughed, and even Carasca's grave countenance now and again relaxed with a smile. Beryl, having some little knowledge of the exalted individuals of whom he spoke—she had read and answered letters from many of them—was much interested in the young fellow's chatter, and to her the meal, which usually seemed inordinately long, passed quickly.

Pauline, when she and Beryl went into the drawing-room, gave Beryl some information about Count Hubert. She had nothing but good to say of him, and prophesied a great future for him.

"He is a distant connection of ours," she said, "and my brother has always had a great affection for him. Hubert's father died when he was very young, and Carasca managed the estates for him; they are very large, and my brother was glad to be able to transfer them to Hubert's own control. He is a great favourite at Court, and the king likes to have him near him. In one thing only has he disappointed us; he has not married. And it is necessary that he should, for he is the last of the Toronnis, and it would not be well that his race should become extinct."

"The count is young yet," said Beryl.

The princess shrugged her shoulders. "Ah, yes," she said, "and he is mercurial; the butterfly will not settle on any flower, but flits from one to the other; but some day he will find a rose too sweet to pass, and then—" she smiled again. "Meanwhile, he is very happy and very content, and he has the knack of making happy all those with whom he comes in contact. I hope he will stay with us some time; but I fear not; he will be missed at Court too much."

Presently Carasca and Count Hubert came in; the former went to his accustomed chair near the fire, which had now become necessary, and the latter, after a few minutes' conversation with the princess, crossed over to Beryl.

"The prince has been telling me of your voice, Miss Frayne," he said; "and I am longing to hear you sing. Would you honour us?"

Beryl rose at once, and he conducted her to the piano with

courtly deference. She sang one of Pauline's favourite songs, and, as he listened, the count's dark eyes began to glow with all an Italian's delight at perfect music.

"The prince said not too much!" he murmured. "You have a divine voice, and you sing—! Ah, well, I can find no words!"

He begged her to sing again, and Beryl chose a popular Italian ballad. He seemed to appreciate her choice of a song in his language, and his dark face flushed with gratification.

"But you sing like an Italian," he said, "and you are English! You have our accent perfectly! Is that not strange?"

"My mother was an Italian!" replied Beryl. She had spoken unthinkingly, and the moment the words had left her lips her face grew pale.

"An Italian!" exclaimed the prince, with a pleased look. "Ah, that accounts for so much. You are half a compatriot of mine, signora! Your mother's name—might one enquire?"

Beryl's hand trembled as she touched the keys. "I do not know," she was about to reply; but, before she could speak, Carasca rose from his chair near her, and said quickly, "Miss Frayne, you are in a draught."

The count looked round quickly, and as quickly went to the window. It was closed. As he came back, the prince said:

"Sing for us, Hubert."

Beryl rose with infinite relief, and crossed over to the princess. The count took her place at the piano and sang. He had a magnificent voice, and, listening to him, Beryl forgot the painful question, the allusion to her mother. Hubert sang very modestly, and when the princess asked for another song he turned and looked at her with a bright smile.

"Ah, but no!" he said. "There used to be some duets in this cabinet; perhaps Miss Frayne will do me the honour and pleasure of singing with me?"

Beryl would have declined, but she never forgot that, though she was treated as an equal, she was a dependant, and she rose at once. The count found some duets.

"Do you sing any of these?" he asked.

"No," said Beryl; "but I will try."

Their voices harmonised perfectly, and the duet was a great success.

"You play and sing at sight," he said, with a frank and almost boyish admiration; "and so perfectly, with such feeling! You are a musician!"

They sang another, and again Hubert expressed his warm approval. When she left the piano, he followed her to her chair, and sat beside her, talking with all an Italian's earnestness and vivacity. When she and the princess retired for the night, he accompanied them to the foot of the stairs, and his dark eyes followed Beryl as she ascended, as if he were loath to lose sight of her.

The prince and he went to the smoking-room to discuss, over their cigarettes, the business which had brought the latter to Pelagio. It was an important matter, but the young fellow seemed incapable of concentrating his attention upon it. He paced up and down the room, with a light, quick step, smoking fast.

"This Miss Frayne?" he asked. "Where did you find her, prince? Are all the English girls so—so beautiful, so charming? Surely not!"

Carasca smiled grimly.

"Not at all," he said. "And so the Cabinet are anxious to pass this bill?"

The count nodded.

"Yes," he replied, absently. "I have not seen a more beautiful face in all my life. And her voice! It is that of an angel! And she is so sweet, so modest, so altogether angelic. Surely she is a lady? And she is your secretary!"

"I should scarcely choose a kitchen wench," returned the prince, laconically.

"Pardon! But is it usual for one so beautiful and so distinguished—is it usual in England for well-born ladies to take positions of servitude?"

"Miss Frayne's circumstances compelled her," said Carasca, curtly. "Can the Cabinet count upon a majority?"

"The king fears not. He needs your presence at Court, prince. There is something sad about her face, a melancholy in her eyes; it is charming, but it makes me sad to see it. One longs to say, 'Tell me of your trouble; let me console you!'"

"Permit me to advise you not to say it," said the prince. "Miss Frayne would not accept your offer of consolation."

Hubert stopped short; his dark face flushed, and a flash came into his eyes.

"Pardon!" he answered, haughtily. "I meant no disrespect to the lady, whom I revere."

Carasca rose with a half-weary smile, and laid his thin hand on the young man's shoulder.

"Impetuous youth," he said, grimly, and yet affection-

ately, "I did not impute anything so offensive. It is evident that I shall not be able to transact any business with you to-night, so I'll go to bed. There are the cigarettes, but do not smoke too much—and do not think too much of my secretary. By-the-way, you will not leave us to-morrow?"

The count bit his lip.

"I intended returning to-morrow," he said; "but I will send one of my men with your reply; it will do just as well."

The prince smiled enigmatically, made his courtly bow, and rang for Stephano.

It is to be feared that Hubert did not follow the prince's advice; the inlaid cigarette-box was empty when he retired to rest.

He did not go on the morrow; but one of his men carried Carasca's reply to Rome. The count was particularly bright and vivacious at breakfast, and when Beryl came out of the library from her work, she found him waiting for her in the hall. He had half a dozen proposals for spending the day. Would she and the princess sail with him on the lake, would they go for a drive, or would they prefer a ride over the hills? He awaited their commands. They went on the lake. Hubert dispensed with the services of a boatman, for he himself was the owner of a yacht, and was quite capable of managing the small craft on which they embarked. He was a pleasant companion; he talked as freely and as brightly as he had done on the preceding evening, and the princess was delighted to have him near her. Beryl steered, but though her attention was necessarily fixed on her work, she was still able to listen to the count, and to smile at his light jests and his amusing stories. In an unobtrusive way he contrived to pay her many attentions. A slight mist at one time drove across the lake, and he left the sail to wrap his cloak round her—Pauline had worn her sealskin from the start—and he placed a cushion at Beryl's back, and managed to convey to her that, next to the safe conduct of the boat, her comfort was his chief care.

It was a pleasant sail, and both the princess and Beryl enjoyed it; indeed, it was difficult to resist the charm of the count's bright and boyish manner.

The evening which followed was made a happy one by his presence. He played and sang, and induced Beryl to sing a duet or two with him; he hovered about her wherever she went. In a word, Count Hubert, the last of the race of Toronni, was infatuated with Beryl Frayne, the Prince of Carasca's secretary.

He did not go on the morrow or the next day. He seemed

to have forgotten entirely the business which had brought him there, and he appeared to be perfectly happy and contented so long as he could be near Beryl.

On the fourth evening of his visit the princess ventured to speak to her brother.

"When does Hubert return to Rome, Carasca?" she asked.

"Why?" he said. "Are you weary of him?"

Pauline smiled.

"Weary of Hubert!" she replied. "How could one be! But I am not blind, Carasca; nor, I think, are you. You must see that he is infatuated with our young English girl. And it is so impossible."

"Impossible; why?"

The princess shrugged her shoulders, and smiled sadly.

"He is a Toronni, and she is—what do they call it?—of the English middle-class. A marriage is impossible."

The prince leant his head upon his hand.

"Nothing is impossible," he said, cynically. "She is, as you say, beneath him in rank; but she may be raised."

Pauline looked at him interrogatively.

"I do not understand, Carasca," she said.

He raised his head.

"Do you not? You have a great regard for this young girl? So also have I. I would do much to ensure her happiness, for reasons of which you know nothing, and need not know. It is in my power to raise her to a rank, if not equal in birth to Count Hubert's, to one which would render his marriage with her a possibility."

"Carasca!" exclaimed the princess.

He rose, with marked agitation.

"Enough!" he said. "I have not decided—I wish to think. But if Hubert desires to wed Beryl Frayne, there shall be no impediment which I can remove."

CHAPTER XXVII.

COUNT HUBERT's presence at the palace shed a gleam of sunshine athwart Beryl's life. He was very little older than herself, and of a bright and cheerful disposition; he had a brilliant intellect, and his never-failing fund of animal spirits was irresistible. The whole place seemed brighter for his musical laugh and his clear, boyish voice.

Little wonder that he was a favourite at Court, seeing that he and *ennui* were total strangers, and that he appeared to

possess the power of dispelling from others the gloom and depression from which he himself never suffered. There was no manly sport in which he did not excel. He rode fearlessly, could manage a boat as well as any of the men on the quay, and even drove the Exmoor ponies—whose erratic habits caused him endless amusement—as well as Beryl herself did; he was also an admirable shot, and when he and the prince sometimes amused themselves by practising with a rifle, it was always the count who scored the most marks.

Had Beryl been heart-free, she must perforce have fallen in love with this Italian Admirable Crichton, with his handsome face and bright smile; had she not met Clive Marle in the Enchanted Valley, she would not have been able to withstand the devoted but respectful attention which Hubert laid at her feet. But Beryl, though she had said good-bye to her lover forever, still cherished his memory in her heart, and there was scarcely an hour of the day that she did not think of him.

The two young people were necessarily very much together, and Beryl grew quite accustomed to having him by her side in her rides and walks and expeditions on the lake. The count was perfectly happy, excepting at such times when Beryl suddenly fell into a brown study, and seemed to forget his presence; then he would sit and watch her with a tender anxiety in his eyes, and with a patience which would have touched the girl's heart—if she had noticed it.

But she was quite blind to the devotion which was so evident to Carasca and his sister. It never occurred to her that any one could possibly fall in love with her now. A girl who is in love with a man, who has given him her whole heart, comes to regard herself as set apart from the ordinary conditions of girlhood; she has no thought for any other man, and it seems to her impossible that any other man should have any thought of her. She liked to have Count Hubert with her, liked to hear him talk of his life at Court, of his friends and of his pursuits; she sympathised with his hopes and ambitions; she admired him—being a woman, she could do no other—admired his handsome face, his graceful figure, the really beautiful voice which harmonised so well with her own; but it stopped there, and went no farther than admiration.

Sometimes he led Beryl to talk of her life in England, and she would tell him of the little cottage in the Enchanted Valley, of the old church in which she played the organ for a livelihood, of her dead father—the tears always came to her eyes when she spoke of him—of the river in which she fished

for trout, of the wild moors over which she had walked, often through the mist and the rain. But never of Clive.

And Hubert listened with rapt attention and a feeling of no little amazement. He could not quite understand it. That a lady—he could see for himself that she was a lady—should earn her living by playing an organ seemed to him incomprehensible. In Italy, she would have been cared for by her friends, would not have been permitted to descend, so to speak, into the ranks of the bread-winners.

He loved her none the less because of her poverty; indeed, his love and admiration were only intensified as he thought of the courage, the self-reliance, which she had displayed; and the lowly conditions of her past life would not have debarred him from avowing his love for her, if he had not been a favourite at Court, and in such close service with the king. He knew that he was not free, that he was, to a certain extent, and in honour, bound to get his royal patron's permission to marry; and that if he married without that permission, he would, in all probability, forfeit his place at Court, and be compelled to surrender his laudable ambition. There were times when he felt that it would be easy to give up everything which he had hitherto held dear for the sake of this beautiful English girl who held his heart in her bosom; but he asked himself if it would be fair to her to cast aside all that he had won, the position, the brilliant future which she ought to share with him; and so he forced himself to remain silent, and, time after time, checked the passionate avowal which rose to his lips.

Carasca watched him narrowly. The count very often was tempted to disclose the state of his feelings to his old friend and guardian; but it was quite unnecessary; the prince knew all about them. From the evening on which he had declared to Pauline, enigmatically, that it was in his power to raise Beryl to rank equal to the count's, he had treated his secretary with a respect and kindness still greater than that which he had hitherto displayed.

This was indicated in various ways.

If he wanted Beryl, he said to her maid: "Will you ask the signora if she is disengaged, and will do me the honour to come to the library?" He rose when she entered the room, and greeted her with a profound bow; if she were going for a drive, he attended her to the carriage; if she were going for a sail, he displayed a great anxiety that every preparation for her comfort should be complete. He addressed her at table, not with the kindly politeness which a man usually accords

his secretary, but with an affectionate gravity which one displays to an equal or a superior. The whole palace seemed to be at her disposal; her favourite flowers were chosen to decorate the table; the princess had found some fault or fancied fault with the piano, and the prince requested Beryl to order another, any other, which would please her.

Additions which tended to increase their luxury were continually being made to Beryl's rooms; a staff of attendants, too large for her simple wants, was told off for her. When she drove into the neighbouring town, the tradespeople received her as if she were a Carasca, and bowed almost to the ground; the people on the estate came to her when they had any favour to ask.

Servants are quick to catch the tone of their master, and the army of servants at Pelagio were no duller than their kind. They saw that this young English girl was a person, almost a personage, whom they were expected to honour, and they paid her that honour lavishly.

Sometimes, when Beryl found herself passing through a line of menials, bowing low, she asked herself whether she were really only Beryl Frayne or a princess. She was embarrassed at first by so much adulation and servility; but, after a time, she got used to it, and ceased to be uncomfortable.

But it had its effect upon her. A great philosopher has said, and with wonderful truth, that we are but the creatures of our environment. Place us amidst humble surroundings, and we are humble and meek; set us on a pedestal, with mankind at our feet, and we become, through no effort of our own, imperial. She did not know it, she would have laughed at the idea, but, all unconsciously, Beryl began to carry herself with something of the air and manner of the princely race represented by the Carascas. She did not become haughty, she was not proud, but there was a certain stateliness in her bearing which, if it were remarked by no one else, did not escape the notice of the prince or princess; and the former smiled when his sister said to him one day:

"How changed Beryl has become! Sometimes, when I see her enter the room, or walk along the terrace, I am reminded of our young sister, Valencia; she is so stately, and so—so—" he paused for a word. "What a sensation she would cause at Court!"

Carasca glanced at Beryl, who was walking on the terrace with Hubert.

"You think so?" he said. "You think she would take her place there, and no mean one?"

"I am sure she would," replied Pauline. "These English have a certain high and lofty way with them; I have noticed that; but it was never more noticeable than in our dear Beryl; without doubt, she would create a sensation. I do not wonder at Hubert's infatuation."

The prince was silent for a moment.

"We shall soon have an opportunity of testing your assertion," he said. "We go to Court next week."

The princess expressed no surprise at the announcement; she was used to her brother's sudden and erratic movements; but when he announced, at dinner, his intention of going to Rome, Beryl looked rather grave and disturbed.

"Can I not stay here, prince?" she asked.

"Oh, no, no!" broke in Count Hubert, eagerly. "We should be lost without you, signora; and I am looking forward with delight to showing you Rome and some of our Court gaiety."

"You could not expect me to go without my secretary," said the prince, gravely, but with a smile; and Beryl, of course, at once subsided.

The night before their departure, the count, after a delightful evening in the drawing-room, where he and Beryl had sung innumerable songs, joined Carasca in the smoking-room, and, as if unable to remain silent any longer, opened his heart to his guardian.

"I love her, Carasca," he said; "to me she is the most beautiful, the most angelic woman I have ever met. You smile! True, I have had many fancies before; but they were fleeting, and passed like—like shadows in the night. My love for the signora, for this English girl, is far different; it will not pass, it will not fade. I wish to make her my wife."

The prince looked, under his white, shaggy brows, at the young man—keenly, searchingly.

"You would make her your wife, Hubert?" he asked.

"It is my wish, my heartfelt wish," replied the count.

Carasca smoked his cigarette meditatively.

"You are aware that she is of humble origin, that she is not of your rank, that she is an alien?"

"I am aware of all that," said the young fellow; "but I do not care. I mean, that I would rather lose all that I have gained, set aside my ambition—bah! what is that compared with her love!—than lose her. I could not be happy without her, prince."

"The king might refuse his consent," said the other.

"Frankly, I should be sorry. His majesty has been good

to me. But I would willingly leave the Court forever, and settle down on my estate, a humble individual, if the signora would share my obscurity."

"You love her so dearly?" said the prince.

"I love her with all my heart and soul!" answered Hubert, passionately. "I am prepared to give up everything for her."

"And do you think she would accept you?"

Count Hubert was silent for a moment; then he said, with rather a troubled look on his handsome face:

"I do not know. Sometimes I think she is not insensible to my devotion; at others, I am filled with fear that she does not regard me as—as a lover or a possible husband. At times, she is dreamy and *distracte*, and seems not to be aware that I am near her or speaking, as if her mind had flown elsewhere. I have never spoken to her of love. I have felt that I dared not; and, indeed, I would not do so until I had gained your consent, for you have been a guardian, a father, to me, prince. She is under your care; you treat her as a daughter. Do you give your consent?"

The prince was silent for a moment or two. He gazed before him, with bent brows and an almost stern expression on his pallid face.

"I treat her as my daughter—yes," he said. "I shall continue to do so, whether she accept or reject you. Some day you may know why I so regard her; at present I remain silent. You, too, will remain silent. You will say nothing to Beryl Frayne until I give you leave."

The count rose and bowed. "I obey your commands, prince," he replied, with courtly politeness. "It is my desire to obey you in all things."

Cascara rose and bowed with a like courtesy. After Hubert had gone, he remained in the smoking-room alone for some minutes; then he went into the library. As he opened the door, he saw Beryl seated at her writing-table. She rose at once, but he motioned to her to resume her seat.

"We go to Rome to-morrow," said the prince. He spoke as calmly and gravely as usual, but there was an agitation underlying his outward calm. "You will not go as my secretary, but as my adopted daughter."

Beryl rose, naturally surprised and agitated.

"As—!"

"As my adopted daughter," repeated Carasca, as calmly as before. "Have you any objection?"

Beryl could not speak for a moment. She was too startled

to utter a word. It was true that the prince and princess had treated her as an equal; but this honour was so definite, and so great.

Again he signed to her to resume her seat.

"Listen!" he said. "I wish you to pay close attention to what I am about to say. As you know, I have no children, I am unmarried. I am quite free to adopt you or any one else as my child. I choose you because I know you, and you have been under my care; because the princess, my sister, has taken you to her heart. While you have been with us you have proved yourself worthy of our regard. But that is not all. There is another reason. I cannot tell you of that; it is, perhaps, as well that you should not know it; but it is a reason which, if you knew it, you would not disregard. In adopting you as my daughter, I am but paying a debt—alas, it is a debt which I can never pay!—I am but striving to atone for the past. What do you say? Are you willing to have me as a father, as the guardian of your future happiness? Speak, my child; do not hesitate. If you will consent, you will, in some measure, lift from my heart a burden which I have carried for many a weary year!" He sank into a chair, and, leaning his head upon his hand, regarded her intently.

Beryl, who had not recovered from her amazement, found it difficult to realise the significance of his offer. The adopted daughter of His Highness the Prince Carasca! It seemed too far-fetched and incredible to be true.

"Do not refuse, my child," said the prince. "Remember that I have a good reason for my action. I—" He stopped, and rising from his chair, went to her and laid his hand upon her head.

Beryl looked up, and saw that the pallid face was working with sorrow and something that seemed to her like remorse. The expression of his face appealed to her, and moved her as no words, however eloquent, could have done.

"I will do what you wish, prince," she answered in a voice scarcely audible.

He drew a long breath of relief, almost of gratitude, and his hand shook as it rested on her head.

"I thank you, my child!" he exclaimed in a voice as low as her own. "God bless you, my daughter!"

He went to his writing-table, and took a parchment from one of the drawers.

"Sign this," he said; "by signing it, you make me your adopted father."

She went to the table and signed. He took another parchment, and held it out to her.

"This belongs to you," he resumed. "You will read it to-night before you go to bed. Take care of it; it is important."

He bent over her and touched her forehead with his lips, and then left the room; but before he closed the door, he said:

"I will make the announcement before breakfast to-morrow."

Beryl carried the parchment to her room, and sat down to read it. It was in Italian, and phrased in a legal form of the most complicated kind; and though she read it as carefully as her agitation would permit, she failed to glean its full significance.

She went to bed at last, not to sleep, but to toss feverishly to and fro. The prince's words haunted her, and bore upon her mind far more than the fact that she had become his adopted daughter. What could they mean?

When she went down-stairs on the morrow, she found the princess and Count Hubert waiting for her at the foot of the stairs; and not only were they there, but all the servants of the household. The major-domo stood in front of the group, with an air of importance on his grave countenance; the hall was full of men-servants in the princely livery, and maids in black dresses and snow-white caps.

Every eye was directed upon her, and as she descended, the major-domo made her a low bow, and his subordinates followed suit.

Beryl paused, overwhelmed by the sight of the crowd, and blushing uncertainly.

What did it mean? Was some State ceremonial in progress; was it a birthday—for she knew that birthdays were celebrated in Italy with much ceremony—or what was it?

As she paused, embarrassed and irresolute, Carasca came forward leaning on Stephano's arm. His pallid face was calm as usual. He ascended the stairs to meet her, and, pausing on the same step, took her hand.

"I present to you," he said, in sonorous tones, "Her Highness, the Princess Beryl Carasca."

Every one bowed low, and a faint murmur of applausé and gratification arose from the crowd in the hall.

Beryl stood amazed and astounded.

"I do not understand—!" she breathed.

The prince led her down the stairs, and into the drawing-room; the princess and Count Hubert followed them.

"Let my congratulations and good wishes be the first, princess," he uttered, with a low bow, and with a flush of delight on his handsome face.

"I do not understand!" again said Beryl, turning to the prince almost piteously.

"You do not?" he said, quietly, but with a gentle smile. "You did not read the paper I gave you? And yet it was quite plain. You are the Princess Beryl Carasca of Pelagio, my adopted daughter. I beg your acceptance of Pelagio; and his majesty has been so gracious as to bestow upon you the title which goes with the estate. I greet the Princess Beryl of Pelagio!" He raised her hand to his lips.

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CHAPTER XXVIII.

If Beryl did not exactly create a sensation in Rome, she attracted a great deal of notice and roused a still larger amount of curiosity. There is no Court in Europe quicker to recognise and appreciate beauty than the Court of his Italian majesty; and Beryl was received most graciously.

There was a halo of romance about the "English Lily," as she was at once called, which appealed to the Italian mind. That Carasca should have adopted her as his daughter, and given her Pelagio, that his majesty should have bestowed upon her the title which went with the estate, did not create much surprise; the prince was unmarried; that the princess should become attached to the beautiful English girl, was only natural. But Beryl's unknown antecedents and her air of reserve—so unlike that of the Italian character—attracted attention, and gave rise to all sorts of stories more or less fabulous.

Very much against her will, Beryl was plunged into all the gaieties of the Court, and she was always surrounded by a throng of courtiers eager to manifest their devotion. At the State and other balls, her programme would have been quickly filled, if she had permitted it; but she preferred to sit out many of the dances, and to look on at the brilliant scene which was so strange to her, and which would have overwhelmed her, if she had not been so often absorbed in her own thoughts. The prince's box at the opera was rarely without two or three exalted personages, who came to pay their respects, not only to the Princess Carasca, but to the Princess Beryl; but Beryl, on these occasions, was almost un-

conscious of their presence, for the opera was her one great delight, and, in that world of music, she was, so to speak, in her own sphere and breathing her natural air.

It need not be said that Count Hubert was at her side as often as possible. His devotion had increased, and was so marked, that all his friends regarded the engagement of Count Hubert to Princess Beryl as a coming certainty; and Hubert only postponed his avowal because of the lack of encouragement which Beryl gave him. She treated him as she treated all the other men who hovered about her; she was always courteous and gentle, but the air of reserve never left her, and, at times, she fell into one of those fits of abstraction to which she had yielded at Pelagio. Now, it is difficult to propose to a lady who not unfrequently appears to be totally ignorant of your existence. The count danced with her, rode with her, attended her to theatre and concert, but he felt that he was no nearer to her than he had been at the palace over the lake.

Of course, the princess was very proud of Beryl's success, and she was never happier than when she was looking on at Beryl amidst her little throng of admirers. Beryl was now a rich woman, for the revenues of Pelagio were large; but though she was quite able to purchase for herself the dresses and jewels she required, Pauline made her numerous and costly presents; and Beryl was obliged to dress more richly than she liked. But there was still an indication of mourning in her costume, and it was evident to the princess that Beryl never, for a moment, forgot her dead father. It was also evident that she did not forget she was the prince's secretary, and that she owed her rank and wealth to his extraordinary generosity. On the day after his bestowal of Pelagio upon her, and during a conversation they had held, Carasca had proposed that she should relinquish her duties, and that he should engage a new secretary; but Beryl had felt and shown so much grief and disappointment at the proposal, that he had abandoned the idea, and consented to permit her to retain her old position.

"It is scarcely fitting, my child," he said, "that you should act—that you should occupy so subordinate a station. Do not forget that you are now the Princess Beryl." He smiled, but there was no answering smile on Beryl's face, and, instead, something that threatened tears.

"I do not know why you have given me all this, why you have raised me to a rank to which I am quite unfitted,"

The prince smiled again.

"To which you are perfectly fitted, princess," he said, quite gently, but with dignity.

"And, indeed, I ought to refuse to accept it," answered Beryl, her lip quivering; "but it was all so sudden—even yet I do not realise it."

"One does not refuse a title bestowed by the king," observed the prince, quietly. "It is a command. But go on."

"And, even now, I would refuse it," said Beryl, "if I am not to be permitted to be of some use to you. I know that I am of very little—"

"That is not so," broke in Carasca, gently. "You are of very great use to me. I should not easily procure a secretary to fill your place; one I could trust so fully and implicitly. And, as your heart seems fixed upon it, my secretary you shall remain. It will be the first time in history, I apprehend, that so exalted a personage has filled so humble a position."

"I am still a very insignificant person, though you have made me a princess," said Beryl. "Why did you do it?" she asked, for the twentieth time.

And, for the twentieth time, the prince smiled gravely, and, like the chamberlain in Tennyson's poem, "put the question by."

So Beryl continued to be Prince Carasca's secretary. She found her duties at the Court much more onerous than they had been at Pelagio. The correspondence was much more bulky; innumerable persons sought interviews with the all-powerful Prince Carasca, and these interviews Beryl had to grant or refuse. The king set great store by Carasca's experience and knowledge of State affairs, and did little without his advice. Beryl had several interviews with his majesty, and the king was particularly gracious to her, treating her as one of the prince's family; and, evidently, much struck, not only by her grace and beauty, but by the modesty and dignity which seemed to be Beryl's birthright.

Of course Beryl's marvellous good fortune, and the admiration which she received, excited the envy of some of her sex; but she sailed through these troubled seas of malicious whisperings and innuendoes with the serenity of perfect unconsciousness. Though she was a princess and mistress of Pelagio, she still seemed to herself the Beryl Frayne of old, the girl who had copied her father's music and played the organ in Trentishoe Church for a livelihood; and it need not be said that she would have, at any moment, exchanged her wealth and position, if, by the exchange, she could have brought back Olive's love and her belief in his innocence.

In the midst of all her triumph, for this season in Rome must, in fairness, be described as a triumph, the memory of the past remained green within her heart, and Clive was rarely absent from her thoughts. All who watched her during this period regarded her as the most fortunate and happy of mortals; but there were times when the blackness of despair and desolation fell upon her, and she was forced to fly to her room to be alone with her grief.

One night—it was the night of a State ball—the princess came to Beryl's room, and found her lying face downwards on her bed, with her arms outstretched, the picture of grief and despair. She was naturally alarmed.

"What is the matter, my child?" she exclaimed, anxiously, as she bent over her.

Beryl rose, and instantly her face assumed its usual expression of calm reserve.

"It is nothing," she said; "I am a little tired, I think."

"You are more than tired, my dear," replied the princess, regarding her keenly but affectionately. "You are in trouble about something. Has anything occurred to—what do you say?—worry you?"

"No, no," replied Beryl. "I was only thinking of—the past; of something that happened long ago. It belongs to the past, and is all over."

Pauline laid her tiny hand upon Beryl's head.

"Are you quite sure it is past, my child?" she asked.

"Quite," replied Beryl, forcing a smile, and in a tone which precluded any further interrogation.

"You must not go to the ball to-night," said the Princess Carasca, tenderly.

"Oh, yes," declared Beryl. "I am quite well; and I need not dance very much. I will rest until it is time for me to dress. Believe me, there is nothing the matter with me."

The little princess was the last person to force a confidence, and, after a little time, during which she insisted upon bathing Beryl's forehead with eau-de-Cologne, and in many other little ways displaying her loving anxiety, she left her, and Beryl dressed for the ball.

It was a splendid function, and Beryl, though rather paler than usual, was one of the most prominent personages.

The Carasca party was rather late, and Count Hubert had been waiting for her with feverish impatience. As the party entered the magnificent room, he came forward from the spot from which he had been watching for her, to greet her, and ask her for as many dances as she would give him.

"I am not going to dance much to-night, Count Hubert," she said, "but I will give you one."

He noticed her pallor, and did not press her.

"Perhaps you will let me sit out one or two with you?" he asked.

He was one of the best dancers in Rome, and Beryl smiled and shook her head.

"You may sit out one, if you like," she said.

He bowed low and drew back, and, though his eyes were seldom off her, he did not approach her until he came to claim his dance. Beryl enjoyed the waltz with him, and, while it went on, almost forgot the old trouble.

"Now I will take you to a cool place," he said. He led her to a palm-house at the end of the series of salons, and found a seat for her in a cool nook surrounded by fountain-splashed ferns.

"You look tired to-night, Princess Beryl," he observed.

"That is not a very gallant speech, count," answered she, forcing a smile. "But it is a very true one. I am rather tired."

"I know!" he said. "I have learnt to read every expression of your face, every intonation of your voice. It has become to me the only knowledge worth acquiring."

"A very simple knowledge, Count Hubert," she replied, rather absently.

"The most precious to me," he went on. "I study your face as the diviner studies the stars! It is all the world to me! Ah, do not be angry! You must know it. You must know that I love you, Princess Beryl; that I have loved you since first we met, there at Pelagio. I have not spoken because I feared my fate; but my eyes, my voice, though I watched over them, must have told you, must have revealed the longing of my heart! I love you, Princess Beryl, and I ask you to be my wife."

He spoke in Italian, and his musical voice trembled with the fervour of his emotion. Beryl gazed before her, trying to take in the significance of his words. She had been thinking of Olive a moment or two before; she had received Count Hubert just as she would have received any other of her admirers, and his proposal amazed and bewildered her.

"Why do you not speak, princess?" he asked, as he fanned her with spasmodic jerks of the huge fan. "Are you displeased, or am I indifferent to you? Ah, but I will ask you not to speak until I have pleaded my cause! I love you—I will say no more of that: the man has said everything when

he has spoken those three words. But I will say that I have Prince Carasca's permission to address you; that he wishes well to my suit. The princess, also, is my friend. They have known me from my boyhood; they will speak for me. Will you not give me some hope? Will you not make them, as well as me, happy by promising to be my wife?"

Beryl's brows came straight, and there was a look of trouble and perplexity in her eyes.

"Your wife!" she said. "You forget that I am only an ordinary English girl—Beryl Frayne—the prince's secretary."

"Pardon, signora," he replied, quickly, earnestly. "I remember that you are the Princess Beryl Carasca, my superior in all things."

Beryl started and sighed, and drew her hand across her brow.

"I had forgotten," she murmured almost to herself.

"And what will you say now that I have reminded you, princess?" he asked in a low voice, the fan still moving in his hand. Beryl looked from side to side, like a wild animal driven to bay. She knew that he had spoken the truth, and that the prince and princess wished her to marry him. What should she do? Count Hubert was all that any woman could desire. There were a score of girls present in the ball-room at that moment who would have been only too proud to accept the offer which he laid so humbly at her feet. She liked him. He was all that was good and noble; young, handsome, of high lineage; it was an honour, a very great honour, he had paid her in asking her to be his wife. Her future happiness would be secure in his charge. And yet Clive's face rose before her, Clive's voice rang in her ears; the shadow of the past rose like an impenetrable wall before her.

"No, no," she breathed, "I cannot!"

The fan stopped suddenly, and its delicate handle snapped in Count Hubert's tightening grasp.

"Stay, princess!" he said. "Do not give me my answer now, I beseech you! Let me wait till you have spoken to the Prince and Princess Carasca—until you have had time to think! I beseech you not to dismiss me irrevocably! I will still hope—I will wait—I will have patience. Your answer is as death or life to me. I will wait until you send for me. And I pray all the gods that you will have pity on my love, and grant my request. I should not have spoken to you to-night, but your beauty, princess—ah, you do not know how it moves one! And we were alone here, and—my heart spoke out. But I will wait!"

Beryl looked before her, her brows still straight, her lips set tightly.

"Yes; give me time!" she breathed. "I do not deserve it! You have done me a very great honour, and—I am grateful. But give me time!"

As she spoke, a short, thick-set man entered the palm-house. He looked round with a slow and impassive glance, which fell upon Beryl. He approached the seat, and bowed to Count Hubert.

"Will you introduce me to the Princess Beryl Carasca, count?" he asked in slow and wooden accents.

With a slight frown of annoyance, Count Hubert rose and bowed.

"I have the honour to introduce Mr. Paretta to the Princess Beryl Carasca," he said, formally, and, bowing again, he left the palm-house.

Beryl acknowledged the introduction by a slight inclination of her head, and Mr. Paretta stood before her in a deferential attitude, his face as impassive as that of a graven image.

"Your highness is not ignorant of my name?" he said. "I have had the honour to receive several letters from you."

Beryl looked at him vacantly for a moment or two; then she remembered having written some letters to him at the prince's dictation.

"I must have written to you, Mr. Paretta, as the prince's secretary," she said, absently.

Mr. Paretta bowed low again.

"I have had that honour, princess," he answered. "The business on which I wrote to you—or the prince—"

Beryl rose.

"I know nothing of the business, Mr. Paretta," she said, wearily.

Mr. Paretta opened his mouth, as if to continue the conversation; but at that moment the Princess Pauline entered the palm-house, and Beryl, forgetting all about Mr. Paretta, hastened towards her.

Mr. Paretta, left alone in the palm-house, stood for a moment rubbing his smooth-shaven cheek; then he returned to the ball-room, and sought a blue-eyed and yellow-haired lady who had attracted a good deal of attention and admiration. She was known here in Rome as Madame Paretta, but she was better known in London as Patsy Pryde. She had just been dancing with one of the notables of the Court, and was flushed and radiant. She was superbly dressed, and glittered with diamonds, not the least brilliant of her gems being the

diamond necklace which she had earned from the Marquis of Doyme.

"Well?" she said, looking up at him with a smile, which never failed to "fetch" the audience at the Empress. "Are you enjoying yourself? Lovely ball, ain't it? Why don't they have this sort of thing in London; or, if they do, why ain't I there?"

"They are not so particular in London," said Mr. Paretta, stolidly.

"All the worse for London," retorted Patsy, without the least resentment. "But what are you looking so gloomy about?"

"I've made a mistake," said Mr. Paretta.

"You don't often make mistakes," remarked Patsy. "It is quite a treat to hear you own to one. What was it? Have you been asking one of the swells to dance with you, and has she refused? They're so 'orty, ain't they? Now, all the swells have been dancing with me. But that's the best of men; if a woman's good-lookin' an' can dance, they don't care who or what she is."

"I daresay," assented Mr. Paretta. "No; I haven't been making a mistake of that kind."

"Well, what is it?" asked Patsy. "You look like an owl with all its feathers rubbed the wrong way."

"My feathers *have* been rubbed the wrong way," said Mr. Paretta. He glanced round slowly. He and Patsy Pryde were in a little alcove, and quite away from the crowd. "I've had a slap in the face. You know, or perhaps you don't know, that I'm over here on business. I want a concession—you wouldn't understand; but it means a large sum of money to me. And I can only get it from Prince Carasca—that tall man with the white hair—"

"Oh, I know Prince Carasca," said Patsy Pryde, "everybody knows that swell."

"Yes; and I can only get at him through his secretary, the Princess Beryl."

Patsy Pryde looked up with an increase of interest.

"The Princess Beryl!" she exclaimed. "That's the lady they're all talking about. I want to see her. All Rome's talking about her. Have you seen her?"

"Yes; and spoken to her, and been sent away with a flea in my ear. She's more haughty than all the rest, and they're bad enough. If I could get at her, I could pull this business through; and it means a pile of money."

"I should like to see her," said Patsy. "Point her out to me."

The two went to the opening of the alcove, and Mr. Paretta looked round with his impassive gaze. Presently his lack-lustre eyes fell upon Beryl as she entered the ball-room on the arm of a Court dignitary.

"That's she," he said, "that young lady with the man in uniform with the diamond cross."

Patsy looked across the room, and gave a pronounced start.

"That!" she cried. "Here, let me get a little nearer! Is that the princess they're all talking about?"

"Yes; there she goes, just dancing," said Mr. Paretta; "the lady in black lace, with the white flower in her bosom."

Patsy Pryde moved forward eagerly, her blue eyes distended with amazement, her mouth open.

"That!" she exclaimed. "Why, that's no princess!"

Mr. Paretta turned his dull eyes upon her.

"That is the Princess Beryl Carasca," he said.

"Not she!" retorted Patsy Pryde. "That's an English girl; I know her! I tell you I know her! She's no princess; she's a fraud!"

Mr. Paretta looked at her with a gleam in his eyes.

"Been at the champagne, Patsy?" he asked.

Patsy was not at all offended.

"Champagne be hanged!" she exclaimed. "I tell you I know her. I've met her in England, and I could tell you something that would bring her down from her perch, high as it is, pretty quickly."

"Then you'd better tell me," said Mr. Paretta, grimly.

"Here, let's get out of this."

A few minutes later Mr. Paretta's carriage was being shouted for.

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CHAPTER XXIX.

As she rode home, by Mr. Paretta's side, in the handsome carriage which he had hired for his stay in Rome, Patsy Pryde felt rather uncomfortable.

To tell the truth, she was just a little afraid of Mr. Paretta. He was quite unlike any other man she knew, and there was something almost gruesome in his unnatural self-possession, impassiveness, and taciturnity. He never got out of temper or angry; he always treated her with consideration and liber-

ality; but just because he was always so calm, Patsy feared him.

Now, if she were going to tell him what she knew of Beryl Frayne, otherwise the Princess Beryl Carasca, she must perforce tell him of her own share in the little comedy, or tragedy, which she enacted in Clive's room; and she didn't quite know how he would take it. So she was rather silent as the carriage bowed smoothly along, and when it stopped at their hotel, she led the way, still silent, to the magnificent room which Mr. Paretta had retained.

"I'll have some champagne, though you accuse me of having had too much already," she said, with a laugh.

Mr. Paretta did not ring for the servant, but himself opened a bottle, and carried a glass to her where she lay back on the couch, with her white fur opera-cloak forming a background to her dainty prettiness, clad in soft silk and be-spangled with diamonds.

"Now, what do you know about the princess?" he asked.

"I know she's no Italian, but just an English girl," replied Patsy.

"Everybody knows that," he commented, stolidly. "Everybody knows that the prince made her acquaintance in England, and engaged her as secretary. She is a young lady of irreproachable character; there is not a breath of scandal about her; and the people here would have been only too glad if they could have found something against her."

This was quite a long speech for Mr. Paretta, and showed how interested he was in the matter.

"I don't know anything about that," said Patsy. "I only know I met her in London."

"Where?" he asked, laconically.

"I saw her at the rooms of a man I know," said Patsy.

"She was alone there."

"How could that be when you were there also?" he asked. Patsy very nearly coloured.

"I went there to call upon the man—on business."

Mr. Paretta did not ask her what business; indeed, his impassive face displayed not the least curiosity on her account.

"She also may have been on business," he said.

"She was engaged to the man," answered Patsy.

Mr. Paretta rolled a cigarette. "That accounts for her presence there," he said. "It's not quite regular, I suppose; but the fact of her presence in the house, rooms, of the man she was going to marry is nothing against her; there is nothing in that which would give me a hold upon her."

He spoke with delightful candour.

"She didn't marry the man," resumed Patsy; "she was alone in London, no chaperon or anything of that kind."

"It's irregular enough," he remarked, "but there's nothing in it that would be of any use to me. Why was the match broken off?"

"His people were opposed to it," replied Patsy.

"Who was the man?" he asked.

"Lord Olive Marle," she answered, after a pause.

Mr. Paretta did not even look at her. "It was a providential escape for her, I should say, from what I know of his lordship."

"Just so," assented Patsy. "Don't you see," eagerly, "there must have been something wrong, something queer. You may bet your life Prince Carasca knows nothing about it; and if you were to go to her and let her see that you were aware of her little escapade up there in London—in Lord Olive's rooms, alone—"

"It would amount to nothing," he interrupted her, laconically. "She's not the sort of girl you want to make her out. I know a straight woman when I see her. You've got hold of a mare's nest."

Patsy shrugged her shoulders. "All right!" she said. "I've told you all I know; and I should have thought it would have been sufficient for your purpose. I should imagine all these swells at Court wouldn't care to be so affectionate and friendly with her if they knew what I've told you."

Mr. Paretta shook his big head. He knew more than Patsy Pryde of the great world, and he knew that a vague, indefinite scandal, such as this, would not hurl the Princess Beryl from her pedestal, or give him any hold on her.

"No," he said, meditatively. "I thought you were going to tell me why Prince Carasca had adopted her, given her a large estate, and made her a princess."

"He took a fancy to her, I suppose," replied Patsy, with another shrug of her white shoulders.

"That scarcely accounts for it," he said, thoughtfully. "If that were all, he would have stopped short at adopting her. I know something of Carasca; he is not the man to take sudden fancies, or to give away a large slice of his property without a reason."

"Perhaps she's his daughter—his real daughter, I mean," suggested Patsy.

Mr. Paretta shook his head. "No," he said. "She is too

English, and there is not the least resemblance between them. She is the daughter of a blind organist."

"And yet I've heard she is half Italian," returned Patsy. "I heard that after I came out here, and before I'd seen her—here, I mean."

Mr. Paretta mused. "I suspect a mystery," he said. "I can't account for her great influence over the prince; and when I can't account for a thing, I get uncomfortable."

"You like to know everything?" queried Patsy.

"In my business knowledge is power," remarked Mr. Paretta, as he dropped the end of his cigarette in a small silver bowl on a table near him.

"Take care!" exclaimed Patsy. "You'll burn that bowl. I only bought it yesterday from that little Jew curiosity-monger."

Mr. Paretta flicked the cigarette from the bowl, and took it up in his hand, regarding it absently.

"Yes; knowledge is my power," he repeated. "Every man's a delicate bit of machinery, and you can set him going or stop him if you can only find the spring. My success in life is owing to the fact that I can generally find the spring. And I shall find that which has moved the Prince Carasca to adopt this English girl and give her a fortune."

"You seem very keen about it," said Patsy.

"I'm always keen where money is concerned," he replied, "and in this case I'm a little keener than usual, because I'm baulked by a woman who has given me the neatest snub I've ever received. Hadn't you better go to bed?"

Patsy rose and yawned. "By-the-way," she said, glancing at the bowl at which he was still gazing in an absent, wooden kind of way, "I wish you'd go and pay that old Jew for the things I've bought. I'm afraid you'll think I bought a lot of them; but it doesn't matter, I suppose."

Mr. Paretta shrugged his shoulders, as if it didn't matter in the least. He sat up for some time smoking and musing. His mask of impassivity screened an amount of vindictiveness which would have astonished his friends. No man ever got the better of Mr. Paretta without regretting the fact sooner or later, for that gentleman was sure to turn the tables and exact his revenge. Beryl's almost unconscious contempt—though contempt is really too strong a word for her indifference—still rankled in his bosom, and he would have given a very large sum to be even with her, as he mentally put it.

The next morning he made some careful enquiries about the prince, but he did not succeed in adding very much to the

knowledge which he already possessed. Carasca had never married; for years he had led an exemplary life—indeed, even in his youth he had not been very wild. There was absolutely nothing “against him;” but still it seemed strange that a man of such exalted rank and immense wealth as Prince Carasca should not have been desirous of begetting an heir to his title and estates. He was musing over this as he strolled along the street in his slow and ponderous fashion, and he stopped to gaze at the window of the curiosity shop at which Patsy Pryde had purchased her *bric-à-brac*, and remembering that she had asked him to pay the bill, he entered the shop.

The proprietor, an elderly Jew, with a bald head and a long white beard, was standing behind the counter examining a gem through a magnifying glass fixed in his eye. He looked like a human vulture as he raised his head and surveyed, with the glass still in his eye, the stolid face and short, thick-set figure of Mr. Paretta.

Mr. Paretta explained his business, and the Jew, with a bow, produced the account. Mr. Paretta eyed the total with a grim smile.

“Madame has made many purchases,” he remarked.

“Not too many, your excellency,” said the Jew. “Madame is a lady of judgment. She knows the value of things; I assure your excellency she made no bad bargain; they were cheap. If all my customers were as clever as madame, and knew as much, I should be ruined.”

Mr. Paretta glanced round the shop, and absently looked at the miscellaneous collection of antique jewellery, modern cameos, time-stained ivories, and the thousand and one indescribable articles which go to make up the collection of a curiosity dealer. It is needless to say that he was not tempted to purchase any of them; but he was rather interested in a case of miniatures which hung in a frame upon the wall. Some of them were good, some of them were bad, and a few were very fine specimens of a branch of art which had recently become fashionable again. With the quickness of his kind, the Jew noticed Paretta’s interest, and shuffling round the counter, unlocked the case. “You see them better without the glass, your excellency,” he said.

“Don’t trouble,” answered Paretta; “I’m not going to buy any.”

“That matters not!” said the Jew. “Not one in a hundred that look buys; I am always pleased to show. If your excellency takes an interest in miniatures—”

"I don't!" put in the other. The Jew ignored the disclaimer.

"I will show your excellency something worth your inspection." He shuffled behind the counter again, took three or four miniatures from a drawer, and spread them out on the top of a glass case. "There!" he said, with his hands outstretched as if he himself were overwhelmed by admiration; "these are the finest specimens which I have ever seen. They are worthy of a place in your National Gallery. I have been there; I know."

Mr. Paretta glanced over his shoulder at the miniatures, prepared to depart; but suddenly the impassivity of his face relaxed for a moment. It was only for a moment, but the Jew saw it; actually saw—or, perhaps, only guessed at—the particular miniature which had attracted his attention; and he took it up in his lean claw and extended it to Paretta.

That gentleman accepted it as if with reluctance. It was an exquisite miniature of an exquisitely lovely face—a woman's. But it was not the beauty of the face which attracted Mr. Paretta's attention, but the fact that it bore a striking resemblance to the Princess Beryl. The likeness was so remarkable that the portrait might have passed for that of Beryl herself.

"Nicely painted," remarked Mr. Paretta.

"It is perfect," said the Jew, emphatically. "If your excellency buys that, you will have an example of the art which is, in my humble opinion, almost unique."

"How much do you want for it?" asked Mr. Paretta.

"One hundred pounds," replied the Jew. Mr. Paretta put the miniature down, as if he had lost an interest in it; but he said, indifferently:

"I will give you fifty for it."

"It pains me to refuse your excellency's offer," said the Jew, with a decision which was either real or admirably feigned. Mr. Paretta folded his receipt methodically, and placed it in his pocket.

"I will give you the hundred for it," he said, looking straight at the Jew with eyes as expressionless as a piece of glass, "on one condition."

"Your excellency will name it?"

"That you tell me the name of the lady, and her history; I mean, who she was, and so on. You understand? As it is scarcely likely that you know anything about her, I'm afraid we sha'n't make a deal."

"Pardon!" said the Jew, easily. "On the contrary, I know all about the lady, and I accept your excellency's offer."

With his eyeglass he examined the gold back of the miniature, then went to his desk, and took out a parchment-covered volume which looked like an account-book, and slowly turned over its leaves. Mr. Paretta watched him without any apparent interest or curiosity. The Jew came presently back to the counter with the book open in his hand.

"What is that?" asked Mr. Paretta.

The Jew tapped the page with a bony, tobacco-stained forefinger.

"When I buy a portrait of any kind," he said, "I make myself acquainted with the name of the original, and anything belonging to its history; it is natural that my customers should want to know what they are buying. As a rule, I can remember the history of everything I buy." He waved his hands with a vulture-like flutter which took in the whole contents of the shop. "But sometimes I forget, as I have done in this case, so I refer to my book, in which I enter all the particulars of the articles I buy. Here," he tapped the open page again, "is the full history of the miniature which your excellency so justly admires."

Mr. Paretta stretched out his hand for the book, but the Jew, with a most courteous bow, drew the book out of his reach. "Pardon, your excellency! Permit me first to peruse the account." He read slowly, very slowly, and as he did so, his small eyes grew sharper and keener. "A thousand pardons, your excellency," he said, "but I find that I have made a lamentable mistake in the price. It is two hundred, not one."

Mr. Paretta did not grow indignant, or display the least surprise or resentment.

"You mean that the miniature is worth one hundred and the history another?" he said, with a *sang-froid* which called forth the Jew's admiration; he could not have done it better himself.

"Your excellency is a marvel of acuteness. It is just as you say. It is even worth more than that to one who knows how to use it; indeed, I feel that I ought not to sell it for any sum, however large."

"I will give you the two hundred," said Mr. Paretta, stolidly, "but not one penny more. You will let me read that account—copy it?"

The Jew made a gesture of assent, but closed the book meaningly. Mr. Paretta took out his pocket-book, extracted

some notes, and laid them on the counter. The Jew took them up with one hand, and pushed the open book across with the other, then fetched a sheet of foolscap and pen and ink. Mr. Paretta looked round significantly, and the Jew, at once understanding the look, took up the writing materials, and, signing to the room behind the door, with a low bow invited him to enter.

Mr. Paretta seated himself at the table, and copied from the stained and yellow page the account or history of the miniature. There was part of another history on the top of the first page, but the Jew, with a gesture of apology, covered that over with a sheet of paper. The transcription took some time; Mr. Paretta wrote slowly and with precision, pausing now and again to blot the paper and wipe his pen, which was a quill of the usual villainous description, and doing it all, the writing, the blotting, the pen-wiping, with an air of the extremest stolidity and impassiveness.

With the same air he looked up when he had finished his copy, and said, slowly:

"Of course the miniature was stolen?"

"Certainly!" assented the Jew, blandly. "Otherwise it would not have come into my possession. I am not afraid to admit the fact to your excellency, because I see that your excellency has some purpose in making the purchase. Of a certainty it was stolen. By one of his highness's servants, I should imagine. As your excellency is aware, some servants cannot resist little things like this."

"Being a thief, he was, in all probability, a liar!" remarked Mr. Paretta.

The Jew shrugged his shoulders.

"In all probability—yes," he assented; "but your excellency need have no doubts as to the authenticity of this account of the miniature. I must have been convinced of its truth, or I should not have entered it in my book. Besides, I remember the lady."

Mr. Paretta nodded.

"Do you keep an account of the names of the persons to whom you sell things?" he asked.

"As a rule—yes," replied the Jew. "But in this instance I shall not do so; I have sold the miniature and its story for so inadequate a sum that I am quite ashamed, and shall endeavour to forget the transaction."

Mr. Paretta nodded, and, with his miniature and its history in his pocket, left the shop.

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CHAPTER XXX.

A MAN with any grit in him does not go down at the first blow of Fate; he staggers about a bit, and tries to hit back; it's true he knows that Fate must ultimately get the best of him, but, all the same, he spars around and endeavours to make a good fight of it, to get some show for his money. Most of us go through life continually sparring with Fate, never hoping to get the better of it, knowing we shall be "downed" in the end, and be carried out of the ring, having fought our last round and been ignominiously worsted; and we are content if we can plant a blow now and again and come up puffing, but smiling, when the referee cries "Time."

Clive, when he read Beryl's letter, neither howled nor wept nor tore his hair; he sat and stared at the sheet of cheap paper, at the faltering handwriting, like a man mazed and utterly overwhelmed by this sudden blow of Fate. He had not been prepared for it. He had imagined all sorts of accidents having happened to her; had pictured her run over, drowned, or dead of heart disease; but that she should have left him of her own free will, cast him aside as too base and vile for acceptance, had not occurred to him.

He rose and went to the sideboard and mixed himself a glass of brandy-and-water—a stiff one; for something seemed to have struck him across the heart and stopped his breathing. He leant one hand on the sideboard, and stared vacantly at the numerous and costly useful and useless articles upon it; and they all danced together as if they were possessed of the devil. He pulled himself together after a minute or two, and squared up to Fate. He accepted his dismissal at once; he had felt all along, that if she discovered that he was Lord Clive Marle, and became acquainted with the reputation which he had acquired, she would cast him off. She had done so. There was an end of it.

The idea of going after her, of pleading his cause, of praying for forgiveness for the past and issuing promissory notes for the future, never occurred to him. She had discovered that he was too bad for her; he could not deny it. He had deceived her, concealed his rank and his bad character; the revelation must have come to her with the force of a shock as severe as that which her letter had given him. Somewhere—

at Trentishoe probably—no doubt she would fly there—fly home like a wounded dove—she was weeping her heart out over her wasted love and shattered illusions. Her love for him had wrecked her life. It was a cheerful thing to think of—and he should think of it as long as he lived.

He was very tired; he thought he'd have a bath; in truth, he did not know what to do, where to go. He rang the bell.

Godwin came in, grave, respectful. Clive stared at him, and then remembered that he had given Parsons a holiday.

"Parsons is out, my lord," said Godwin, apologetically, and in his low voice. "I will wait upon your lordship."

"I want a bath, Godwin."

He looked so haggard, his voice was so broken and hoarse, that Godwin would have been justified in looking shocked; but he did not appear to notice the change in his master's nephew, and in the same subdued tone gave the conventional "yes, my lord."

"Has any one been here, Godwin?"

"No, my lord," replied Godwin.

"Have you been here all the time?" asked Clive.

"Yes, my lord," said Godwin. "I arranged with Parsons to take charge while he was absent."

Clive sighed. He had no reason to doubt the man's word; he had scarcely hoped to hear any tidings of Beryl. He had his bath, then he went downstairs again, sat by the window and looked out on the park; and saw nothing but Beryl's face, white and tear-stained with agony. He could not endure this very long, so he rang for his hat.

"If—if any one comes, Godwin," he said—"a lady—come down to the club for me, and bring any letters that may come."

"Yes, my lord," said Godwin. "I am to ask the lady to wait?"

Clive nodded; he found it difficult to speak. He went down to the club, and got into a quiet corner of the smoking-room, smoked a strong Murias, and drank brandy-and-water, though brandy was a spirit that he seldom touched. He knew that he ought to eat something, but the thought of food made him bad. Men dropped in and spoke or nodded as they passed; one or two sauntered up and dropped down beside him for a friendly chat; but Clive's face was so ghastly and his manner so strange that they soon left him, marvelling what had happened to him. He would not leave the club until it closed, for he feared the solitude of his own room, feared it so

much that, when he left the club, he wandered about the streets.

He had not drunk much, but he felt unsteady on his feet, and he knew that the faithful and suspicious policeman looked at him curiously as he passed. He walked about till morning, and then let himself in with his latch-key. He was tired out, exhausted in mind and body, but though he threw himself on the bed, he could not sleep. His lost happiness haunted him; the Enchanted Valley passed before him like a ghastly panorama, in front of which, as it glided by, floated the white face of the woman he had lost; he heard her voice mingling with the chimes of the clock, with the cries in the street, now started once more on its daily life.

When he rang for Parsons, that devoted domestic almost started at sight of his master.

"Are you ill, my lord?" he could not refrain from asking.

"No," said Clive; but his voice did not reassure Parsons, who went out with a portentous shake of the head to prepare the bath. Lord Clive had evidently been "up to something," something worse than usual. He served a dainty little breakfast, but Clive could only drink some coffee, and did not even pretend to eat the piece of toast which, for appearance' sake, he had taken on his plate; and soon after the breakfast was cleared, he helped himself to a brandy-and-soda. Brandy-and-soda in the early morning is a deleterious drink. It brings a flush to the cheek, it sets the heart a-going, it winds you up, so to speak; but you soon run down again. Clive ran down very quickly. He stood at the window and looked out, and wondered what the devil he should do with himself. It seemed to him that life had come to an end; just that.

He felt as if something had gone out of him, as if he were the mere shell of his former self, a machine moving mechanically and utterly without volition or soul. He thought he would go for a ride, and he ordered his horse; but when he had taken a couple of turns in the Row, he got sick of the sight of the people, of the trees and the railings, of his own hand which held the reins, and he rode home.

"Mr. Fleming is here, my lord," said Parsons.

Clive went into the sitting-room, and the agent rose to greet him. Fleming was a middle-aged man, who knew more, infinitely more, about the Doyme and Marle affairs than any one else, not excluding, most certainly, the marquis and Clive.

"Why the devil didn't you come before?" was Clive's greeting, after he had shaken hands.

Fleming was startled by the touch of the burning hand and

the expression of Lord Olive's face; but he knew him too well to make any comment, and plunged into the business at once. Olive sank into a chair and seemed to listen; but in a very few minutes the agent saw that he might just as well have been speaking to the chair itself, and he pulled up, and, after a pause, asked:

"What do you think we had better do, my lord?"

"Eh?" said Olive, waking from a dream. "Oh, do just what you like."

"There are two courses open to us, my lord," said poor Fleming. "I'll explain them again."

"Don't trouble, Fleming," replied Olive. "Do what you think best; I don't care in the very least. Have some wine; stay to lunch?"

Fleming declined, suppressed a groan, and rose to take his leave.

"Things are rather serious, my lord," he said, suggestively.

"They always were, and will be," assented Olive, with a most sublime indifference. "I leave it all to you, Fleming."

Fleming might have retorted that there wasn't much to leave, but he was a good and faithful servant, and sincerely attached to the family, in which he and his had served so long; so he didn't tell Lord Olive that he was a young fool, and bent on destruction, but gravely went his way.

When Fleming had gone, Olive wondered again what he should do; the machine had to work, but it seemed a useless bit of business, and he wished that it could be made to stop.

A record of his movements on that and the two following days would be monotonous, not to say tedious. He himself scarcely knew what he did, or where he went; he ate but little, slept not at all, but drank much. On the third day he ran against Sir William Fagan, almost literally ran against him, and the famous doctor recoiled and danced aside with a hasty exclamation which his patients seldom heard. Then he recognised Olive, and caught him by the arm, and looked at him with a growing sternness.

"What are you doing here?" he asked. "I thought I sent you to Devonshire, and you went?"

"I did go," said Olive, "and you see the result. I suppose you want that mourning ring you think I've left you, doctor?" he added, with ghastly humor.

"If you've left me one I shall soon get it," answered Sir William, grimly, as he slid his hand down Olive's arm, and got on to his pulse. "You're worse than you were before. What have you been doing with yourself?"

"Going to the devil, as usual," replied Clive.

"Well, you go in good company," retorted Sir William, with some exasperation, and he hurried on. Not a hundred yards from the spot where he had parted from Clive, he met the marquis—absurdly young, beautifully dressed, with the Doyne smile ready to greet his old doctor. "I've just met Clive," said Sir William; "you'd better look after him, unless you want that fellow you hate to come into the title."

The marquis still smiled, but his under-lip twitched slightly.

"He was in splendid condition when I saw him last," he said.

"Was he?" retorted Sir William. "He's in anything but splendid condition now. I give you warning. Get him out of London. Can't stop," and away he went.

The marquis went on, and found Clive leaning over the railings of the duck pond, and apparently watching those interesting fowl with intense interest.

"Ah, Clive, my dear boy!" said the marquis.

Clive turned, and it says much for that inimitable presence of mind and *sang-froid* which had made the noble marquis famous that he neither started nor uttered an exclamation.

"A piece of luck, my meeting you, my dear Clive, for I was going on to your house, and I—do—hate those steps of yours!"

"What is it?" asked Clive, without any superfluity of courtesy.

The marquis declined to recognise his nephew's lapse from politeness, and replied, cheerily: "Just had a letter from Lady Dorchester, dear boy. She's down with Blanche at Glengowrie, you know. Says they've been disappointed in one or two guns, and hints that if you are anywhere about, and haven't anything better to do, you'll be welcome down there. Deuced kind of her, you know; especially when one remembers that she could fill the house and make up her number in five minutes. What do you say? She tells me the birds are plentiful and in splendid condition. You look awfully fit this morning, dear boy."

He made the appallingly mendacious assertion without the quiver of an eyelid. "Shall I send them a wire to say that you are coming? Better! Town's disgustingly empty, and there's no good in staying here."

"If you like," said Clive, almost mechanically; he wanted to get rid of the marquis as soon as possible, and if he had asked him if he would like to start in a balloon with the North

Pole for his destination, Clive would have replied, "If you like."

"Very well, then," replied Doyne, cheerfully. "I'm going past your place, and I'll tell Parsons to get ready."

He forgot his objection to the steps. As he walked on, leaving Clive still staring at the ducks, the marquis's smile flickered and went out.

"Poor devil!" he muttered. "He's hard hit. He must have been deuced fond of the girl. He'll get over it; the man always does; it's the girl who suffers longest. But what a narrow escape! Patsy earned that necklace."

Clive went home after a time, and dragged his weary feet up to his bedroom. He gazed absently at the portmanteau, gun-case, fishing-rods, and other impedimenta which were neatly stacked ready for transit.

"What's this, Parsons?" he asked, indicating the pile of luggage.

Parsons stared at him.

"The marquis told me to pack for Glengowrie, my lord," he said.

"I'm not going," answered Clive.

Parsons looked confused. "I've just taken the tickets, my lord," he remarked. "The marquis said he'd wired to say you were coming!"

Clive, with a sigh, dropped on the bed. "Oh, very well," he said, resignedly.

He tossed about in the sleeping-car which that night bore him north; now and again he fell into an uneasy slumber, in which he dreamt that he was going to Trentishoe; then he awoke and remembered that he was going to Glengowrie, which is in the opposite direction to the Enchanted Valley; and at these waking moments he felt bad, very bad indeed. When he got to the station, the Glengowrie chariot was waiting for him; the servants greeted him with that manner which is indicative of the profound respect felt for a supremely-honoured guest; the like reception waited him at the great house. He was conducted with a certain amount of state to his own room; it was one of the best in the castle. He was evidently not expected to put in an appearance at breakfast, for Parsons brought him a daintily-spread tray, and Lady Dorchester's message that he should not come down until he had rested.

"They treat me like an invalid," thought Clive. "Did you tell Lady Dorchester I was ill?" he asked Parsons, with an irritability of recent growth.

Parsons coloured guiltily. "I did say to her ladyship's

maid, my lord, that you were not quite the thing," he admitted, apologetically.

"Confound you!" said Olive. "Get me up. I'm going down at once."

But he did not get down till after breakfast, for he was strangely tired—he who had tramped over the Devonshire hills and moors mile upon mile, hour after hour, without feeling the slightest weariness!—and his heart was going with that peculiar tick, tick, with which it had worked when we first made his acquaintance.

When he went down to the morning-room, he found Lady Dorchester seated by the fireplace—the morning was cold—engaged in knitting. She always knitted—when she was in Scotland, and the problem: What becomes of the knitting which Lady Dorchester does? provided an occupation and amusement for the visitors when the weather was too bad for shooting or fishing. She was too well-bred to start or exclaim at Olive's altered appearance, but greeted him with rather more warmth than is considered good form in these unemotional days.

"My dear Clive!" she said—she had known Clive since his babyhood—"why did you not rest after that terrible journey? It always knocks me up for three days. But you are so strong!" She made the assertion with an *aplomb* which would have done credit to the marquis himself. "The rest have gone over to the hut, and Blanche said that perhaps you would like to follow them; the dog-cart is waiting; but I dare-say you would prefer to remain at home to-day, notwithstanding that there is only an old woman to keep you company. We shall have plenty to talk about, for I have not seen you for a long while."

Again Clive felt he was being treated like an invalid, and, with the unreasonableness of a man in his condition, promptly resented it.

"I'm not a bit tired," he said, civilly, but firmly. "And if you don't mind my leaving you, I'll join the party; they may want all the guns."

"You will have something before you go?" asked Lady Dorchester. "An egg beaten up in milk?"

Clive could not help laughing, but it was a grim and mirthless laugh, as he declined the egg and milk, and he got into the dog-cart with his guns, and was driven to the shooting hut. As he was bowling along the well-kept road, he was asking himself why the devil he was there. But he knew well enough. He had been lured, driven, to Glengowrie by the

marquis, in the hope that he, Clive, would at last "do his duty," and propose to Lady Blanche. He was in a cynical humour that morning, his heart was full of bitterness; he was just in that condition in which men do desperate things for the sake of doing them. He could not help reflecting that Blanche—well, loved him; that if he married her there would be an end of all his money difficulties. And, though he had not listened to Fleming, he knew that those difficulties were serious. Why should he not propose to Blanche? He had lost Beryl forever. It did not matter in the least whom he married, whether he lived or died. Nothing mattered; he was but a machine, without volition or soul.

As he neared the hut, a figure emerged from the doorway, walked in the opposite direction, then, suddenly catching sight of the dog-cart, hesitated, stopped short, and came back towards it. Clive recognised the figure. It was that of Lord Clarence, his rival. He was also about the last man Clive wanted to meet at that moment; but there was no help for it. Lord Clarence was a fair man, with blue eyes and a golden moustache. Usually he was about the best-tempered man in the world, but his good-tempered face clouded over at the sight of Clive; and well it might. Lord Clarence had asked Lady Blanche to be his wife; she had promised to give him his answer in a fortnight. The fortnight was nearly up, his heart was buoyed up by hope—and now, here was Clive Marle!

Now, Clarence had reason to believe that his rival did not love Blanche; and yet here he was, evidently going to propose to her. That struck Lord Clarence as decidedly unfair. It was not, as he would have put it, the straight thing.

He was a young fellow with plenty of pluck. He came to a sudden resolution as he came up to the dog-cart. The two men nodded to each other in the curt way which modern fashion ordains.

"Party's gone on, Marle," said Lord Clarence. "Better come in and have a nip of whisky before you start," he added, as he eyed Clive's pale and haggard face.

Clive got down, and was about to dismiss the dog-cart, but the other said: "Oh, let him wait a minute, will you?"

The two men entered the hut; Clive sank on to a seat, breathing rather heavily; Lord Clarence poured out a "go" of whisky, and gravely watched him drink it; then, as the colour slowly mounted to Clive's face, Lord Clarence said:

"Lady Blanche expected you. She is waiting at the Three Forks. You will go to her, I suppose?"

Olive nodded and looked up. There was something in the tone of the question which struck him as significant.

"So I thought," said the other. The colour showed through his tan, and his blue eyes shone gravely. "Look here, Marle. Of course, I know why you've come down here. Don't think me impertinent. I don't mean to be offensive; but I'm obliged to speak because—well, your coming is of great importance to me. You are going to propose to Lady Blanche?"

Olive nodded. His face was pale again now, and he eyed Lord Clarence with all the Doyme calmness and impassiveness.

"I thought so," said the latter. "Do you mind if I ask you a straight question?"

"Ask as many as you like," replied Olive.

"All right! Then I'll ask you, do you care for—love Lady Blanche?"

The young fellow's face paled under its tan, and his lips were set tightly. Olive looked at him steadily. He was, so to speak, on his honour; he had promised to answer, and a man does not lie—that is, if he is a gentleman—on such occasions.

"No," he said, and the word dropped like an icicle from his lips.

"I thought not," replied Lord Clarence. "I do! I have asked Lady Blanche to be my wife, and I'm waiting for the answer. If you had not come, I believe it would have been 'yes.' If you don't love her, is that a fair and straight thing? I put it to you as man to man. Is it a fair thing to marry a girl for her money?"

Olive sprang to his feet, his face white, then he sank down again. What right had he to resent the man's question?

"It's not a straight thing," he admitted, "and, by Heaven, I won't do it!" His voice was hoarse and almost inaudible; but Lord Clarence heard him, and held out his hand.

"Thanks, thanks!" he said, with a true British phlegm. "You'll go back?"

"After I've seen Lady Blanche," answered Olive, grimly. "Wait here for ten minutes, then you can follow on."

He shouldered his gun, and strode along the narrow track towards the Three Forks. Lady Blanche was seated at the foot of one of the three huge firs which gave the place its name.

She did not rise, the exquisite serenity of her beautiful face was not broken, and she held out her ungloved hand as calmly as if she had only parted from him two days before.

"It was kind of you to wait for me, Blanche," he said.

She looked steadily at his haggard face, as if she knew that there was something more to come.

"I came down to say good-bye," he began. He tried to smile, but the smile would not work, and he knew that his voice was thick and husky.

"Good-bye?" she repeated after him. Her voice did not falter, her face did not grow pale, but her eyelids drooped for a moment, a moment only, then they were lifted, and her eyes met his again steadily.

"Yes," he said; "I am going abroad. I shall be away for some time, I expect."

"Where are you going?" she asked.

"I'm not quite sure," he replied. "To Africa, I think. I am starting at once; in fact, I've got the dog-cart to take me back to the castle."

She rose and held out her hand.

"It is very sudden," she said.

"Yes," he assented, with his eyes fixed on the ground. He still held her hand.

"I hope you will be happy wherever you go—Clive," she said. The little pause before his name was the only indication of any emotion.

"Thank you—Blanche," he responded. "Good-bye."

She withdrew her hand. Clive turned away; but, after a step or two, he paused, and, looking half over his shoulder, said, in a low voice:

"Lord Clarence is coming along. You will wait for him?"

"I will wait for him," she said.

Their eyes met, withdrew from each other, and Clive left her.

He met Lord Clarence on the narrow track.

"You will find Lady Blanche at the Three Forks," said Clive, grimly.

"Thanks!" answered Lord Clarence. That was all.

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CHAPTER XXXI.

THE Carasca party left the ball soon after Mr. Paretta and Patsy Pryde. As Beryl leant back in the corner of the carriage, she was very pale; the agitation which Count Hubert's proposal had caused her had passed, and was followed by an intense weariness, and her heart ached.

That she should marry him or any one else was simply impossible. She still loved Olive, and, even if she had been able to forget him, the shadow over her mother's life was a sufficient barrier to any marriage. She was sorry, very sorry, for Count Hubert; she liked him very much, and the evident sincerity of his love touched her very deeply. Though she was still so young, Beryl was no longer a girl, but a woman; sorrow carries a girl more quickly than any other emotion over that narrow brook which divides girlhood from womanhood. If it had been possible for her to forget Olive, she would have tried to return Count Hubert's love, and would have given him some hope; but it was impossible; even if her mother's past had not been in the way, her love for Olive was still the dominant feeling in her heart.

The count would come to her for her answer; what should she say to him?

"You look tired to-night, my child," said the Princess Pauline as she drew the opera-cloak from Beryl's white shoulders. "I hope we shall not stay in Rome long; it is always too gay for me, and I love better to be in quietude; and so do you, also, I think, *cara mia*. How beautiful you look to-night! How you blush when I say that! You English girls are so shy. Now, if I had said that to an Italian, she would have thrown her arms round my neck and kissed me."

"I can do that, although I am only English!" said Beryl, and she bent and kissed the princess.

"Ah! my dear, you are charming! No wonder the men pay you so much court. Poor Hubert! I pity him!"

The crimson flooded Beryl's face, but she would not speak. If she had been going to accept Count Torroni, she would have told the princess of his proposal; but she felt that it would be unfair to say a word which might add to his embarrassment.

Prince Carasca noticed her pallor. "You gather more roses at Pelagio than in Rome, my child," he said. "We will return there as soon as possible." He smiled. "I say 'we;' I am forgetting that we should wait for an invitation."

Beryl looked at him a little piteously. She had not yet grown accustomed to the fact that the magnificent palace above the lake and its far-reaching domain were hers.

"I could not go without you," she said. "I shall never be able to convince myself that I am really a princess, and that Pelagio has been given to me!"

"It will come in time," he said, with his grave smile. "But we will go with you if you will let us."

Stephano entered the salon with a pile of letters, which he took to Beryl, as a matter of course.

"Are the lights in the library?" she asked.

"You will not open them to-night!" said Prince Carasca; "let them wait until to-morrow."

"I will open some of them, I think," answered Beryl. "I should not sleep if I went to bed; but you shall not see them until the morning."

As she left the salon, with the letters in her hand, the princess looked at her brother.

"I think Hubert has proposed to her to-night," she said. "She looks as if something had occurred, and he was so agitated when he put on my cloak that I could feel his hands tremble. I hope she will accept him. He is a dear good boy, and she—ah, well, we know what she is. Hubert will have the best, as well as the loveliest, of wives in the world!"

"Yes," replied the prince, gravely, and with a deep sigh. "I hope she will. I want to see her happy!"

"You are very fond of her, Carasca?" said the princess.

His gravity increased. "I am very fond of her," he assented. "Who would not be? I wish to see her happy!"

The princess thought for a moment, with her head on one side.

"She is still somewhat of a puzzle to me, Carasca," she said. "I love her, but I do not yet understand her. There is always a kind of veil enshrouding her; it is not thicker than a spider's web, but one can never pass behind it. She is still so young—and yet at times she seems like a woman."

"She has suffered," answered Carasca, laconically.

Beryl sat down at the bureau in the library, and slowly and absently opened the letters. They proved to be, most of them, of the usual kind which Prince Carasca received. There were applications for Government employment, proposals for new companies, letters from the Italian colonies, letters of a political character. Beryl knew them all, and how to deal with them. One letter interested her. It was from a lady who was desirous of joining a band of nurses who were going out to Africa, and who requested the prince to give her a letter of introduction. She said that she was the daughter of an Italian general, one of a large family, and she saw no other opening in life than this for which she felt specially fitted. Beryl sighed as she read the letter, and laid it aside with the others.

At that moment she almost envied the girl who wanted to go out into the world and do some real work; who could, in

the execution of that work, forget herself and all the world. The last letter was from Mr. Paretta. He wrote concisely respecting the concession for which he had applied some months ago, and his letter recalled him to Beryl's mind. She remembered how curtly she had dismissed him at the ball, and she was sorry; for, like all sensitive natures, she shrank from giving even a moment's pain to another. She wondered whether it would be possible for Prince Carasca to grant the man's request.

She put the letter aside with the rest, and then, resting her arms on the writing-table, leant her head upon her hand.

She was a princess, honoured and courted; she was rich beyond any dream which she could have had of wealth and power; her hand was sought by a man who was in every way desirable, and yet how sad and lonely and weary she felt! She dreaded to go to her room; it would be so easy to think there; and she did not want to think. She thought she would arrange her papers. They had grown to a formidable pile since she had been in Rome, and their disorder weighed upon her, for Beryl's sense of order was strong. She began to endorse the letters she had answered, and place them in their proper pigeon-holes.

As she was doing so she pressed rather heavily on the top of one of the innumerable drawers with which the bureau was furnished; it yielded beneath her pressure, and the drawer shot out beyond what she would have considered its proper length, and disclosed a small bundle of letters enclosed in envelopes. Mechanically, she took up the bundle and looked at it absently rather than curiously; but, as she looked, something in the handwriting of the address on the envelope at the top attracted her attention. It was addressed to Prince Carasca; the handwriting was evidently a woman's: it was of the angular, Italian style, and it seemed to Beryl that she had seen it before. She gazed at it absently for a moment or two, then she dropped the bundle of letters, and shrank back with a feeling of terror. Surely the handwriting was that of the note which she had found beside her dead father's hand—was like her mother's!

She rose, trembling, and, averting her gaze, replaced the bundle of letters, closed the bureau, and went up to her room.

But the similarity of the handwriting haunted her, and she went to the *escritoire* and took out the letter. The writing, if not the same, was strangely, awfully similar. She read her mother's note, which she had not perused since the day she had found it, then returned it to its place, and went to bed.

She slept little that night. And it was not of Count Hubert she thought, or even of Clive Marle, but of the time-stained bundle of letters tied with the faded ribbon. She seemed to be surrounded by an atmosphere of mystery which oppressed her, and cast over her the shadow of a vague and nameless fear.

She was very pale when she came down to breakfast the next morning, and the princess remarked the pallor, and declared that they must lose no time in leaving Rome.

"You shall not be troubled with letters this morning," said Prince Carasca. But Beryl only smiled as she led the way to the library. She wrote with her usual readiness and acuteness. The letter from the young girl who wanted to go out as a nurse to Africa, with the others, came under their consideration.

"I know her," said the prince. "Her father died recently; there is a large family. I do not know that she can do better than she proposes. Write the letter of recommendation."

"And what shall I say to this Mr. Paretti?" asked Beryl as she came to his letter.

The prince knit his brows. "*Per Baccho!*" exclaimed the prince. "The man is a nuisance! As I told you, he is a mere adventurer, one of those financiers who hover like vultures over every land. Send him an ambiguous answer!"

"He spoke to me last night at the ball," said Beryl, wearily.

The prince swore in Italian under his breath. "He is an impudent fellow!" he declared. "I should like to give him a definite refusal; but the man offers good terms, and I am a servant of the State, and must study its interests. Is that all?"

Beryl was silent for a moment; then she said:

"Last night, as I was arranging my papers, I inadvertently touched a secret spring—at least, I think I must have done so—and the drawer shot out, and disclosed a bundle of letters."

"Show me which drawer," he said, gravely.

Beryl pressed upon the panel, and the drawer sprung outwards, revealing the ribbon-tied envelopes. The prince laid his hand upon them, and turned his face to Beryl; it was white and agitated.

"Have you read them?" he asked. Then, as he saw the look of surprise on Beryl's face, he said, abruptly: "Pardon! Yes; it is a secret drawer. I forgot the letters were there. They are private. They do not concern you." His voice

grew thick and harsh. He took up the letters, and thrust them in his pocket.

Beryl sat quite motionless.

"Is there anything else?" she asked.

He had sunk into a chair, and was gazing before him vacantly, and like a man in a dream.

"There is nothing else," he said. "Only this," he added:

"I want to tell you, Princess Beryl, that what I have given to you is yours by right. Never for a moment permit yourself to doubt it. It is yours—yours!"

He left the room almost as he spoke. Beryl finished her letters, and endorsed those which she had received. While she was doing it, Stephano, who was the only domestic servant permitted to enter the library, brought her a card on a salver. It was that of Count Hubert.

Beryl inclined her head, and Count Hubert entered. He was dressed with scrupulous care, was pale, and evidently fighting for self-possession. He bent his head over Beryl's hand, as one who bends before a superior in rank; then he looked at her, with all his love burning in his eyes.

"I am early; I have come too soon, princess!" he said; and though he tried to speak calmly, his voice quavered. "I have come for your answer. I have lain awake all night, dreading, and yet hoping for it. It cannot tell you more than I told you last night. I love you; I pray you to be my wife! I have loved you since the first moment I saw you; I shall love you till I die. You are the only woman in the world for me; I cannot be happy without you! If you say 'No,' life will be for me, for the future, but a life in death! All my hopes are centred in you! Have some pity, Princess Beryl, and give me some hope! I know that you English are cold and hard to woo, but you cannot be insensible to love. Diana herself could not be untouched by such devotion as mine. I could have spoken long ago, there, by the Lake of Pelagio, but I dared not. You seemed so cold, so remote! I have waited, waited long, as it seems to me, and I must speak at last. The prince is in my favour; the princess loves me, and wishes me well! Ah, princess, grant my prayer! I will make you happy!"

Beryl stood, white and trembling.

"I am sorry—sorry—sorry!"

"Why are you sorry?" he asked, his pallor increasing, his lips trembling. "Is it because you cannot love me?"

There was a silence, accentuated by the ticking of the jewelled clock on the sideboard.

"Yes," said Beryl; "I cannot love you! I like you. I think you are all that is good and noble. I am grateful. I would lay down my life to give you happiness. But I cannot marry you!"

"Why not, if you think so much of me; I, who am not worthy a moment of your thoughts?"

Beryl turned her face away.

"I cannot love you, Count Hubert!" she repeated.

"I do not ask you," he said, eagerly, desperately. "Why should you love me? You, who are so beautiful, so peerless, the queen of womanhood. I do not ask you to love me—yet! But love will come in time! Such love as mine must awaken love in return. Say one word to me that will give me hope. I ask only for that! I will wait—I will be patient! Your love is to me dearer than life itself. Indeed, I cannot live without you!"

"Oh, hush! hush!" said Beryl, brokenly. "I am not worthy!"

"You are worthy!" he cried, his hands outstretched, pleadingly. "There is no woman in the world who is more worthy, more beautiful. Give me some hope, princess!"

Beryl turned away from him, and sank into a chair. He came behind her, his hands gripping the back of the chair in a grip of steel. They left the chair after a moment, and stole towards her shoulders, and touched them. At his touch, Beryl's spirit revolted. She rose, white, statuesque.

"I cannot!" she exclaimed. "Don't ask me. If I could—ah, if I could! But I cannot! Go now, Count Hubert. Find some girl, some woman who can return your love. I cannot! I have lost the power to love. I must live alone, with nothing but the memory of the past to dwell on. Oh, go! go!"

Count Hubert stood upright behind the chair. His face was white, his lips set tightly.

"There is some one else, princess?" he said, interrogatively. "Forgive me! I have no right to ask. Some one in England. I am sorry. My heart is aching. All my life I shall long for you. I shall not forget you. But this man whom you love—where is he?"

Beryl's head drooped. "There is no one else," she said. "Will you go?"

His head drooped. "I will go!" he said. "But remember that I love you always; that I shall love you while life lasts; that if at any time you may need me—ah, pardon!—I

express myself badly! If at any time you want a friend, you will find him in Uberto Torroni."

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CHAPTER XXXII.

As Count Hubert was passing through the hall, Prince Carasca was leaving the salon. At sight of the young fellow's pale and agitated face, the prince stopped and looked at him steadily.

"I have come to say good-bye, prince," said Hubert. "I am going on foreign service." He tried to smile and speak lightly, but not very successfully.

"Is this not sudden, Hubert?" asked Carasca.

The young man coloured. "I applied for the post two days ago," he said, "or, rather, for the refusal; and I have decided not to refuse it."

"May one, without intruding, ask your reason for this sudden departure?"

Count Hubert looked at his friend and guardian steadily, and tried to smile again.

"I have asked the Princess Beryl to be my wife, and she has refused," he said. "I cannot remain in Rome any longer; I must go. To be near her, knowing that I cannot win her, would be a torture too great."

"She has refused you? Why?"

Hubert shrugged his shoulders. "She does not love me," he said. His head drooped, and he put his hand to his lips to hide their trembling.

"Love is sometimes of slow growth," said the prince.

The young fellow drew back his head, and passed his hand across his eyes. "She will never love me," he answered.

"There is something between us, some one or some shadow—I know not which; but it is like a barrier of steel, against which my heart beats in vain. I must go; but I shall never forget her. I shall never love another woman—who could, having loved her? There is no girl in all Italy, in all the world, so beautiful or so sweet as the English Lily, and I shall carry the memory of her into the wilds into which I go. There, at least, I shall be able to hide myself and my misery." With a trembling hand he took the flower from his coat, and held it out.

"Give this to the Princess Carasca, with my love, and my

"Surely you should address your request to Prince Carasca?" she said.

"No, your highness," he returned. "I come to you because I know that the matter rests with you."

"With me?" Beryl was seldom haughty, but she looked every inch a princess at that moment.

"Certainly," he responded, quite unmoved. "I am aware—who is not?—that you have great influence over the prince, that he will do in this, and most matters, as you desire. I will beg your highness to listen to me," for Beryl's face had eloquently expressed her intention of bringing the interview to a speedy close. "This matter is one of great importance to me. I will not conceal from your highness the fact that, if I obtain this concession and grant, it will benefit me pecuniarily to a very large amount. I have a great deal at stake—not only money, but reputation. I have been very patient, but I can wait no longer. I must ask your highness to use your great influence with the prince to obtain for me what I require. I am aware that, in most cases like the present, it is usual to offer a consideration. Here nothing is done without a bribe. I am also aware that an offer of any consideration, of a money character, would be resented by your highness."

Beryl stared at the man in amazement. Was he out of his mind? She was sorry she had granted him the interview, and now all that she desired was to bring it to an end, and be rid of him.

"I have listened to you, Mr. Paretta," she said, very coldly, "and I have only to say that all you have said should have been addressed to Prince Carasca. The influence of which you speak, with which you credit me, does not exist. And if it did"—her eyes rested upon him haughtily—"I do not know of any reason why I should use it in your favour."

"Just so, your highness," he replied, with an impassiveness which, even at that moment, struck Beryl as unique. "I shall have the pleasure of showing you. Permit me to say that, had you been so gracious as to grant my request, I should have left this room without another word; but you have forced my hand, so to speak, and I have to play my trump card."

Beryl stared at him. There was something behind the man's wooden demeanour which impressed, almost fascinated her.

"I do not know why you speak like this, Mr. Paretta," she said. "I am simply Prince Carasca's secretary. I do as he bids me; I write as he dictates. I have absolutely no influ-

once over his highness. To me, personally, it does not matter whether he grants your request or refuses it."

"Pardon me!" said Mr. Paretta. "You are Prince Carasca's secretary; but you are also the Princess Beryl, the mistress of Pelagio. Did you never ask yourself why you, who, only a short time back, were an English girl, of poor and of humble position, have been raised to rank and fortune by his highness, the Prince Carasca?"

The blood rushed to Beryl's face. The man must be mad; and yet his face and his manner were perfectly calm and self-possessed. She glanced at the bell which would summon Stephano to relieve her of the man's presence. Mr. Paretta's eyes followed hers.

"One moment, your highness," he said. "I judge by your expression that you are unable to answer my question. Permit me to give you some information. I am a man of business. I have been very successful; in fact, I may say that I have not embarked on any undertaking without accomplishing the object I had in view. The world is pleased to say that I am possessed of an acute mind and extraordinary judgment. The world does me too much credit. As a matter of fact, I am rather slow than acute, and my judgment is often at fault; but the tortoise, you know, often leaves the hare behind, and I fancy that the reason is to be found in the fact that the tortoise has a knack of looking about him and choosing the easier course. I look about me. I choose my course; I take advantage of every stick and stone; in my way of life, men and women are sticks and stones, and they help me, sometimes consciously, sometimes unconsciously; but I always get to the winning-post. One of your great literary men—I forget his name—said that knowledge was power. It was a clever thing for a literary man to say, for, as far as I've gone, your literary man is an idiot. Knowledge is power, and so I am always on the look-out for it. You don't know why Prince Carasca has made you, an unknown English girl, a princess, and dowered you with a vast estate. I do!"

Beryl listened in amazement; but she was impressed by the man's demeanour, by the very tone of his voice. Had he got excited, raved, and raised his voice, she would have summoned Stephano long ago; but Mr. Paretta did not appear at all excited, and his voice was slow and even and low. She glanced towards the bell, it is true, but she did not ring it.

"You know?" escaped her lips, unwittingly.

"I know," he assented. "The problem which has agitated the butterflies of the Court here ever since you came, prin-

cess, lies in solution before me. I do not claim omniscience; I lay no claim to extraordinary acuteness; what I have discovered I discovered by one of those accidents of which men of my class and calling are always prompt to avail themselves."

Beryl listened, with her eyes fixed on his face. A vague presentiment of coming ill fell upon her. She began to loathe the man, to long for anything that would remove him from her presence; and yet she could not stretch out her hand towards the bell!

"I spoke, just now, of the consideration which one offers when one desires a favour," resumed Mr. Paretta. "Though I would not venture to offer your highness a monetary bribe, I will venture to present to you some token which will prove to you the importance which I attach to the concessions I desire to obtain."

He took from his pocket-book the miniature which he had purchased of the Jew curiosity-monger, and laid it on the table under her eyes.

Beryl looked at it with an indifference which was only half-feigned.

"I will ask you to examine it, princess," said Mr. Paretta.

Beryl stretched out her hand and took up the miniature. As she looked at it, the stately library, with its book-lined walls, its statuary and bronzes, disappeared, and, in their place, was the simple parlor at Trentishoe, with her mother's portrait on its walls. For this miniature seemed but a replica of that portrait. It was her mother's face, so strangely, so weirdly like her own!

Her breath came and went; she felt choking. The eyes which shone so pathetically from the miniature seemed to rest upon her pleadingly. With the portrait in her hand, she sank back, then she raised her eyes to Mr. Paretta's, which were as dull and expressionless as usual.

"You recognise it, princess?" he said.

Beryl drew a long breath. She could not speak. The portrait held her in every fibre of her being. It seemed to her as if the past were emerging slowly from the veil, the mist which had surrounded it. She could not speak.

"I bought it from an old Jew in the Via della Madonna; you may know the shop. I recognised its resemblance to your highness. I asked for its history. I obtained it. Would you like to hear it?"

Beryl's hand closed over the miniature. She made no motion of assent, but Mr. Paretta, in the same wooden voice, went on:

"It will interest you. The lady whose portrait you hold was the wife of a young and poor musician. He was desirous of completing his musical studies in Italy, and he and his young wife came to the little village or hamlet beside the Lake of Pelagio, close by the palace of which your highness is the proud and happy mistress."

Beryl repressed a shudder; a cold hand was reaching for her heart, had nearly touched it.

"She was an Italian. I did not say that she was beautiful—you have the miniature, you have a looking-glass; she is like you. In my wanderings, I have found that there is no nature so fickle and so changeable as the Italian. It's a matter of climate. This young wife of the struggling musician had all the characteristics of her race. Her husband was older than herself; he was poor and struggling. Up at the palace, on the hills above the lake, was a prince who was rich and all-powerful. This prince made the acquaintance of the musician and his beautiful bride. It is not difficult to guess the rest. Given a husband older than one's self, a lover of exalted rank, young and handsome, and of one's own nationality—well, the problem is of easy solution. The prince loved the young Italian bride. They must have met often; there must have been many opportunities for, I daresay, the Englishman was wedded to his art—probably neglected his wife. It must have been an easy conquest, for, as I say, the Italian character is fickle and susceptible. At any rate, the musician's wife left her husband, and came under the protection of the powerful prince, her lover."

Beryl's hand opened, and the miniature fell to the floor. Mr. Paretta politely recovered the portrait, and placed it on the table, from whence its dark and pathetic eyes seemed to gaze at Beryl.

"The Englishman returned with the child of his marriage to England," continued he, as calmly and impassively as if he were reading a report; "the woman whom he had lured from her husband remained with the prince. I think he must have loved her very well, for he was faithful to her to the end. She died—died at Pelagio."

Beryl drew a long breath. She seemed stifling, choking. Was she dreaming, was she in the throes of a hideous nightmare, was this man indeed telling her the history of her mother's shame?

"She died at Pelagio," continued Mr. Paretta. "The deceived husband and his child returned to England, where he buried himself, according to the usual rôle, in a benighted

place in Devonshire. Thither, some years afterwards, the prince went in search of health. There he discovered the daughter of the man he had robbed. His love for the woman he had wronged must have been deeper than usual, for he conceived the idea of offering reparation to her daughter."

Beryl rose, white to the lips, and clutching the chair for support. Her terrible agitation did not move Mr. Paretta in the slightest.

"He engaged her as his secretary," he went on. "His idea of reparation grew—I've always noticed that such ideas do grow—he adopted her as his daughter, bestowed upon her one of his numerous estates, and gave her the title of princess which went with that estate. She is now one of the most conspicuous personages in Rome. The world, so to speak, is at her feet. She may make almost a royal marriage. She is wealthy, titled, honoured. Only one man knows the secret by which she has climbed, has been hoisted, if you like, to her pedestal. That man, your highness, stands before you."

He leant against the table, one hand rubbing his chin, the other thrust in his coat-pocket, his small eyes fixed with a wooden, but observant, expression upon his victim.

Beryl stood erect, her hands gripping the chair, her face white as death. She knew that the man was speaking the truth. She knew now why the handwriting on the bundle of letters had resembled that of the letter which she had found beside her dead father. She knew now why Prince Carasca had treated her with such consideration, with such tenderness; affection for her dead mother, whom he had ruined, remorse for her fate had been the motive for his kindness, his generosity to her daughter. The walls seemed to close round about her; she lost all sense of Mr. Paretta's presence until he spoke again.

"I await your highness's decision. The story I have told you is known only to me. Obtain for me the concession, the grant, which I require, and no word shall escape me. Refuse, and the history of Princess Beryl, and her accession to rank and wealth, will become public property. I do not ask much. It is just a letter from the prince; no more. Having obtained it, I leave Italy to-morrow, and the knowledge which I have obtained by a lucky accident, remains buried in my breast. I am the last man to cause inconvenience; I have no desire to surround Miss Frayne—pardon, your highness!—the Princess Beryl with scandal. I only desire to obtain these concessions. It rests with you; I await your answer,"

Beryl was no longer a girl, but a woman. "I must have time!" she panted.

Mr. Paretta bowed. "I will give your highness until to-morrow evening at six o'clock."

"Come then for your answer," she replied.

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CHAPTER XXXIII.

BERYL stood erect for some few minutes. Her brain was in a whirl; but her heart seemed to have ceased beating; for the man's revelation had stricken her as lightning strokes, and paralysed her faculties. She clasped her head with her hands, and tried to think, to realise the full significance of the situation.

Now, even the novelist, who is supposed to know everything, in reality knows very little of the human heart. He has certain rules by which he works, but these rules are based on hypotheses which are very often quite erroneous. For instance, take this case of Beryl's. Nine persons out of ten would be perfectly certain that Mr. Paretta's revelation would fill Beryl with hatred and loathing for the man who had led her mother astray; she herself felt that she ought to hate and loathe him; but the human heart is a strange piece of mechanism, and there was no such sentiment, at any rate, in Beryl's.

Not even the knowledge that Prince Carasca was the man who ruined her father's life, and cast a shadow of shame over hers, could wipe out the memory of his kindness, his tenderness, his generosity to her. He had adopted her as his daughter, and she had grown fond of him. To love is to forgive. Even at that moment her heart was pleading on his behalf. He had sinned, but he had attempted to make reparation. She could not accept that reparation, she could accept nothing from his hands, but he had made the attempt, and, woman-like, she could not be insensible to it.

She took up the miniature, and went slowly, and like one in a dream, to her own room. She had to act, and at once; but a darkness like a pall hung before her, and obscured every exit from the terrible maze. The great palace became at once a prison to her; the satin-lined walls of her luxurious rooms seemed closing in upon her, and threatening to crush her. Of one thing only she was certain; she must leave Prince Cascara's roof, must restore to him the title and the wealth which he had bestowed on her.

Physical exhaustion came as a natural accompaniment to her mental anguish, and she lay upon the bed, with her eyes closed and her hands clinched, struggling against the weakness which overwhelmed her. After a while there came a knock at the door, and the princess's voice calling to her. Beryl managed to say that she had a headache, and was not able to come down, and Pauline, with a few words of sympathy, left the door.

The day passed, and Beryl still lay, incapable of movement, almost of thought. At dinner-time, her maid and the princess came with food. In the dim light the latter could not see the change in Beryl's face.

"We have brought you something to eat, *cara mia*," she said. "You must not come down to-night; there is a large party, as usual. The prince is so distressed by your illness; I cannot tell you! He says that you must go to Pelagio to-morrow. If he and I cannot accompany you—and it will be difficult to leave the Court so suddenly—you must go alone. It is evident that Rome does not agree with you. And besides"—she looked round to see that the maid had left the room—"you have been upset. Carasca has told me about Hubert. Poor boy! I am sorry for him. And you, too, are sorry for him, I know; for you have a tender heart, my child; but you must not let it make you unhappy; neither I nor Carasca will ever refer to what has passed. And as for Hubert—well, he will suffer, of course, but he is young and a man, and men are soon consoled for the loss of us. Rest now, dear, and try to sleep, for you have the journey before you to-morrow." She kissed Beryl, and touched the bed-clothes with that gentle, comforting little touch of which women alone know the secret; and Beryl was left with her fateful problem still unsolved.

Strangely enough, she slept all through the night; still more strangely, she woke in all her usual strength, though her heart ached with its load of unhappiness. As she dressed herself she arrived at something like a decision; she would leave Prince Carasca's roof at once. Though the weakness of the preceding day had passed, she was conscious of a strange feeling; her head was hot, her lips dry and burning, but her hands were cold, and every now and then a tremor shot through her.

"Is your highness sure that you are well enough to leave your room?" enquired her maid, with respectful anxiety, for, in brushing Beryl's hair, she had noticed the feverish heat.

"Will not your highness rest quietly to-day? Your head must ache, it is so hot; it burns my hand."

"I am quite well," said Beryl. "I must go down."

The maid shook her head, but could not venture to say any more. When Beryl went down the stairs, her face was white, with two round patches of scarlet just under the eyes, which shone with unnatural brightness; a band of iron seemed to be pressing round her head; but she felt strangely calm and self-possessed, and her mind was quite clear. She had breakfasted in her own room, and, avoiding the salon, she went straight to the library, and having rung for Stephano, asked him for the letters; she would do her duty until the last moment.

"His highness has them, princess," answered Stephano. As he spoke, the Princess Carasca entered the room.

"How wicked of you to think of doing anything to-day!" she said. "Do you think Carasca would let you read or write a single letter when you are so unwell?"

Beryl moved, so that her back was to the light. "I am quite well," she said again; "I would rather do my work."

"You are very wicked and obstinate," replied the princess, lovingly. "You are like a little mule!"

"And you are very good," responded Beryl, with a sudden burst of tenderness. She put her arm round the princess, and let her head drop on the little woman's shoulder; and, for a moment, a storm of tears threatened, but she fought against it, and, forcing a smile, said: "Yes; you have been very good to me, and I am very grateful. Whatever happens, do not think I have forgotten you, or ceased to be grateful for all your loving care of me!"

Pauline looked alarmed, but patted Beryl on the shoulder; and, in a tone which one uses to an overwrought child, said, soothingly:

"*Cara mia*, what can happen? You are feverish and upset; you shall go to Pelagio to-night, and will soon be all right again."

She would have taken Beryl to her own room, but Beryl begged to be left in the shaded and quiet library; and the princess, thinking it best to humour her, left her alone.

Beryl sank into a chair, and leant back, with her eyes closed; they seemed to be burning through the lids. Suddenly she looked up, conscious that some one was in the room, and saw the prince standing, looking at her. She rose and met the gaze of his dark eyes with an expression, half of fright, half of sorrow, in hers.

"The letters?" she said, almost inaudibly, as she turned away.

"You must not do anything to-day," he replied. "You are not fit, not well enough; you must not distress yourself. The letters can wait until to-morrow."

"To-morrow will be too late," she returned, scarcely knowing what she said.

"Too late!" he echoed. His voice was very grave, but there was no indication of surprise in his tone. Something in the expression of her face, in her manner of turning from him, may have warned him that she had discovered the truth. He stood erect, as a man stands who is awaiting a blow, and his eyes did not leave her face.

"Yes," said Beryl, "I must go!"

She stood, with her face turned from him, one hand grasping a chair, the other pressed against her heart. At that moment she looked so like her mother that it almost seemed to him that it was the dead woman herself. A wave of remorse swept over him, his lips twitched, and a sigh escaped them.

"I will not ask you why you tell me this," he said.

Beryl took the miniature from her pocket, and laid it on the table between them. His hand went out towards it shakingly, and he took it up, and looked at it long and silently, as if he had forgotten Beryl's presence.

"You know the truth?" he asked in a low voice.

Beryl made a slight gesture of assent, her face still averted.

His head drooped as his hand closed over the miniature tightly.

"I will not ask you how you discovered this miniature, and learnt its story. I had hoped against hope that you might remain in ignorance. I do not know whether your informant has told you the whole story of your mother's flight. It matters little. My bitterest foe could not paint my conduct in blacker colours than it deserves, and I utter no plea to you, who are the child of the woman I loved, and made my own. I loved her; let that suffice. She died and left me with a heart harassed by remorse and broken by her loss. It sometimes happens with us men that remorse awakens a burning desire to make reparation. That desire haunted me from the moment she died; but to the dead no reparation is possible. By chance, I met you in England. You were her child, were fatherless, and in poverty. Can you not understand that the craving for reparation seized upon me and overmastered my judgment? You were *her* child, were like her in form and feature; it was as if her wraith had returned to earth to grant

me the opportunity, the possibility, for which I longed day and night. She was dead, but you, her child, were alive, and I asked myself: 'Why should I not make her child mine? Why should I not shield her, protect her, as I would have shielded and protected—ah, God, as I did shield and protect!—her mother?' " His voice broke, he sank into a chair, and screened his eyes with his hand.

Beryl's heart was beating heavily; the tears seemed to rise to her eyes, but the heat in them burnt up the tears, so that they could not flow.

"I yielded to the temptation," continued the prince. "I brought you here; you entered into my daily life. You are like your mother in face and voice. In every turn of your head, in every expression, I see her mirrored. You have stolen into my heart, and have become to me as a child of my own. I have fought against my love for you, for, even in the hours of the consolation which my affection for you brought, I have felt that some day, sooner or later, the Nemesis that dogs the footsteps of the evil-doer would overtake me, that you would discover the truth, and that the dream of reparation would prove but a dream indeed!"

His voice had become almost inaudible. Beryl breathed painfully. A feeling of pity for this man, whom she ought to hate, was stealing over her.

"I do not ask you to forgive," he said, "though your mother forgave me before she died; aye, while she was living. I will only ask you to believe that my remorse is genuine, that my desire to make reparation, in any form or shape, has been, since your mother's death, the absorbing desire of my life. You tell me now that you are going. You turn from me as from one whom you should regard with fear and repugnance. I make no protest, my child. You are right. But if you can find it possible to entertain one spark of pity for the man who has shadowed your young life, I will ask you to deal mercifully with me, to permit me, though I may never see you again, to make some provision, to stretch out a hand, to shield you from the perils and hardships which assail and await the woman who is alone and unprotected. You will retain what I have given you? It is but a feather's weight set against the wrong which I did your mother. I implore you to grant me this, at least. My dream of reparation is shattered; but leave this thought to comfort me in the hour of death—which is not far off—that I have set you above the sordid cares, the evil chances, of this world. Grant me this!"

He stretched out one white, thin hand. Beryl tried to say,

"No;" but a woman's pity had cast out hate, and the "No" died on her lips.

Though it might be impossible for her to receive anything at Prince Carasca's hands, she could not bring herself to tell him so. He was silent a moment or two, then he said:

"My sister knows nothing. There is no need that she should share this trouble, should share my punishment. If you will go with her to Pelagio, I will remain here in Rome; I will not intrude myself either now or at any time. The sight of me must be hateful to you, my child; I will not inflict it upon you. I have spoken to you frankly and openly because you are no longer a girl, but a woman who can weigh and appreciate facts. Would that I could believe that the repentance, the remorse which I have experienced could awaken some touch of sympathy in your breast! You will need time to consider all that I have said; I will leave you now."

Beryl turned and looked at him. The tall, gaunt figure was erect, but the pallid face was ashen grey; he had managed to control his voice, but his face betrayed him, and discovered the intensity of his emotion. Pity for the sinner in the hour of his punishment, with his dream of reparation lying shattered at his feet, welled up in her heart. She made a gesture, as if to stay him, an inarticulate murmur which was like a sob. Carasca stopped, and, turning, looked at her.

"You can forgive me?" he said, in a voice broken for the first time. "You—her child—can forgive me?"

Beryl held out her hand. He took it, and pressed it in both his, and his dark eyes rested on her with a profound gratitude and a deep tenderness.

"May God bless you, and all the saints of Heaven have you in their keeping, my child!" he said.

His voice was almost inaudible at the last words, and his left hand went to his heart; he staggered slightly, as if about to fall; then, with an effort, he drew himself up and raised the hand in the air with the action of a benediction. His eyes rested upon her solemnly, and with a peacefulness, a serenity, which Beryl had never before seen in them, his lips moved—it seemed to her as if in prayer—then he left her. Some impulse prompted her to follow him, to speak to him; she went unsteadily as far as the door, but her voice failed her, and no words would come, and in silence she watched the tall, prince-

surroundings; she felt a craving for the open air, for the breadth of the blue sky. She went upstairs and found in the vast wardrobe the black dress and travelling-cloak and hat in which she had left Trentishoe. Almost mechanically she put them on, and went downstairs again. She met her maid in the hall, and the woman looked at the unaccustomed dress with surprise, and at the white face with anxiety.

"Shall I accompany your highness?" she asked, with respectful solicitude.

Beryl shook her head.

"No," she said; "I may be some time. Tell the princess—" She paused irresolutely, and looked round vaguely, and, leaving the sentence unfinished, crossed the hall and passed out.

The great thoroughfare in which the Carasca palace stood was crowded with carriages and foot passengers; she crossed the road, and absently entered one of the narrower streets. The crowd was less here, and she walked on, looking straight before her, with only one desire—to reach some place where she could be alone and could think. In no city of Europe is the contrast between wealth and poverty, splendour and squalor, more marked or more quickly arrived at. Before she had gone half a mile she had reached that quarter in which the houses are crowded together in narrow and dirty streets, and in which the Roman poor, as elsewhere, herd together and hide their poverty from the hard, unfeeling eyes of the rich. Through narrow bye-ways, and courts and alleys still narrower, she paced with hurried feet. Every now and then a man, slouching past, turned to look at her with dull, apathetic eyes; women watched her from open doorways, and remarked to each other on her beauty and grace; children, half-clad, ran up to her and begged with Italian persistence. Evil smells arose round her; now and again shrill cries of the street merchants smote on her ear.

Beryl regarded nothing, but walked on, still searching for the quiet spot in which she should be able to think, think!

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CHAPTER XXXIV.

At last she came to that for which she sought. In a little square, surrounded by old houses, stood an ancient church. Its stones were stained by time and weather; the iron railing which surrounded it was bent and broken; it was a church of

the poor. The door was open—all the church doors in Italy are open day and night—and its grim old portals, the depth of shadow within, invited Beryl to enter. She passed in, her hand touching the doorway for support. The building was dark; the light was burning before the altar, and she passed up the church and knelt on the stone steps, worn into hollows by the knees of countless devotees who had knelt there in search of pardon and of peace.

In the hour of our sorrow all religions merge into one, and God is seen through many vistas, and reached by devious ways. Beryl knelt on the altar steps and rested her forehead on the cool stone, as many a heart-stricken woman had done before her.

Her prayer, if a prayer it can be called, was a mute one. How long she knelt she did not know; but, after awhile, she rose painfully. As she did so, it seemed to her that the church had grown darker, that its roof was weighing upon her head; a strange feeling of lassitude, of helplessness, took possession of her; she attempted to retrace her steps to the door, but her feet seemed to refuse to obey her will; she staggered and stretched out her hand in search of something to support her; but she was in the middle of the aisle, and would have fallen but that a woman, who had been watching her for some minutes past, glided quickly forward and caught her.

"You are ill, signora?" she said.

Beryl opened her eyes, which had closed, and looked at her. The woman, who was indeed a girl as young as herself, was dressed in the garb of the Nursing Sisters. Her face was plain, but sweet, and, at this moment, full of pity.

"Yes; I must be ill," said Beryl. "I cannot stand—I am sorry!"

A moment afterwards her senses left her. The woman who held her looked round the church, and beckoned another woman wearing the same garb, who hurried to her side.

"It is the Roman fever," she said. "She is very ill, poor thing!"

"What shall we do?" asked the other sister.

"There is only one thing to do," replied the woman who was supporting Beryl. "We must take her to the Home. Go and call a carriage."

"Can you support her?" asked the other.

"Ah, yes; she is so slight, poor girl! Go quickly!"

The second sister found a carriage, and, between them, the two placed Beryl in it.

"She is a lady, Sister Ursula," remarked the woman who

had gone for the carriage, as she looked at Beryl lying in Sister Ursula's arms.

"I know it, Sister Marta," returned Ursula. "But she is ill, and in trouble; and it is not only the poor, but all in sorrow and in distress, who have a claim upon us."

The carriage drew up at a tall and rather forbidding-looking house in a narrow street, and the sisters carried Beryl to a small, but scrupulously clean, bedroom.

The house was one of the Nursing Sisters'. Beryl had fallen into good and tender hands.

They sent for a doctor.

His practice lay exclusively amongst the poor, and he did not recognise Beryl as Prince Carasca's adopted daughter. "Yes; it is our fever," he said, curtly. "She is very ill; she will need careful nursing. Do you know who she is?"

Sister Ursula was silent for a moment as she looked at the plain and inexpensive clothes which she had taken from Beryl. Her woman's wit—for one does not nurse the poor without acquiring some experience and discretion—prompted her to evade the question.

"I found her in the church of St. Andrea; I have not asked her, nor shall, any questions; it is not our custom."

The doctor nodded. He was a busy and overworked man, and the private histories of his patients had very little interest for him.

"You know what to do as well as I, sister. Get some ice; keep her quiet; if there is anything on her mind, don't let her worry."

"Is she going to die?" asked Sister Ursula, with a pitying glance at the beautiful face lying like a lily on the hard pillow—for there is little luxury in the houses of the Nursing Sisters.

The doctor shrugged his shoulders in true Italian fashion.

"Who can say? She is young, and in good hands."

He bowed himself out.

At six o'clock that evening, while Beryl was lying unconscious in her place of refuge, Mr. Paretta prepared to leave the first-class hotel in which Madame Paretta, *alias* Patsy Pryde, and he had the best rooms.

"I daresay we shall leave Rome to-morrow, Patsy," he said as he adjusted his necktie. "My business here is finished."

Patsy Pryde was dressing for an early dinner; they were going to the opera that night.

"You've always got business everywhere," she remarked. "What about that Princess Beryl? Did anything come of it? You're so close that no one knows what you're up to."

He twisted his head round as he tied the simple bow which we men always find so difficult.

"I've had some business with her," he said, with stolid complacency. "And I'm going to bring it to a conclusion this evening. If it pans out as I expect, you shall have that villa in Regent's Park which you seem to have set your heart on."

Patsy Pryde laughed.

"What a wonderful man you are! You always get what you want."

Mr. Paretta relaxed into what he called a smile. Having completed his toilet, he set out on foot for the Carasca Palace. He was quite complacent and at ease. That any girl should hesitate between granting his simple request and facing a scandal which would blight her name seemed impossible, not to say ridiculous.

He felt quite sure that he should return from the Carasca Palace with the letter he wanted, the letter which would put so many thousands into his already plethoric pockets.

As he reached the palace he looked up stolidly, and vaguely noticed that all the heavy blinds were drawn; but the fact did not impress him very much, because the setting sun was shining full upon the vast place; but, as he stepped slowly and heavily into the vestibule, he was struck by the absence of the usual bustle made by servants and callers. Indeed, he had to wait some minutes before the hall-porter came to him. The man was pale and evidently excited, and he looked at Mr. Paretta and then beyond him, as if he were of little or no consequence.

"Is the Princess Beryl within?" asked Mr. Paretta.

The porter cast a glance at him.

"Her highness is not at home," he said, mechanically.

"My business is of importance," remarked Mr. Paretta.

"I tell you, signor, the Princess Beryl is out."

Mr. Paretta thought for a moment. It was six o'clock—past; if he could not see her, he would go direct to the prince. This concession he must and would have.

"Is Prince Carasca at home?" he asked, in his wooden way.

The porter stared at him.

"Has not the signor heard?" he demanded, gesticulating with all an Italian's facility.

"What?" demanded Mr. Paretta. "I have heard nothing."

"*Per Baccho!* Is it possible? All Rome is full of it! highness the prince is dead!"

Mr. Paretta stared at the man.

"Dead!" he exclaimed.

"Dead!" repeated the porter, violently, every limbphasizing the assertion. "His highness—God rest his—died suddenly this afternoon! The doctors are now discussing over the corpse. He is dead, I tell you; and there is great man the less in Italy."

Mr. Paretta regarded fixedly the mosaic of the hall. "the Princess Beryl?" he asked.

"Saints in Heaven! Do I not tell you?" exclaimed porter. "Her highness is not here; she is not to be found. The Princess Carasca is seeking her everywhere! What is signor's business?"

Mr. Paretta stared at the ground again. "It doesn't matter," he said.

The porter shrugged his shoulders, and dived into his box. Mr. Paretta stood for a moment as if examining the intricate design of the marble flooring, then he turned, and slowly back to his hotel.

Patsy Pryde was just going in to dinner. He stood before her, looking, not at her, but into vacancy.

"Pack up your things," he said. "For once I've lost game. Oh, don't ask any questions. I've spent no end of money, taken no end of trouble over this business, and I'm sick. Pack up your things. I want to clear out."

Beryl remained unconscious for nearly a week, and Sister Ursula devoted herself to the stricken girl. At the end of the week she returned to consciousness, and her eyes opened with some degree of intelligence upon the plain but sweet of the sister who had nursed her and the coldly severe which had sheltered her.

As usual, she asked the question, "Where am I?"

"In good hands, I hope," said Sister Ursula. "Through one of the houses of the Nursing Sisters, and you are safe, and, I hope, well cared for."

"I am sure of that," answered Beryl. "What is my name?"

"Sister Ursula," was the reply. "I found you in the church of St. Andrea; you were very ill, and I brought you here. But you are better now, and I hope you will soon completely recover."

Beryl sighed. It seemed to her at that moment that it would be better if she did not recover. At that moment

the hour of the weakness which follows Roman fever, she longed for death. Death meant forgetfulness and rest and peace. In death, surely she would not be haunted, as she had been through all her hours of consciousness, by the memory of the past. In death, Clive's face and voice could not haunt her. In death, the story of her mother's shame would be lost in oblivion.

"And you have nursed me all this time?" she asked.

"How long is it?"

"A long while—some days," replied Sister Ursula, gently.

"So long?" said Beryl. "How tired you must be! Am I strong enough to get up and relieve you of your burden?"

Sister Ursula smiled, with a smile of the nurse who has watched beside her patient for many a weary hour, and knows her patient's weakness.

"Not yet," she answered, placidly. "It will be some time before you will be well enough to leave your bed, and to go out into the world."

Beryl turned away her head. "I must try and get well soon," she said. "I have no right to be a burden to you."

"The sick and the poor and the helpless have always a claim upon us," responded Sister Ursula. "We should not let you go until you are quite recovered."

Beryl raised herself upon her elbow and looked steadily at the plain but kindly face.

"I want to go as soon as I am able," she said. "Where do you say I am?"

"At one of the houses of the Nursing Sisters," repeated Sister Ursula. "We are banded together to nurse the sick and needy; you need have no scruples in accepting our ministrations."

Something in her tone attracted Beryl's attention.

"Do you know who I am?" she asked.

Sister Ursula looked aside; her averted face was like a blank.

"I may know, or I may not," she said. "We ask no questions, we seek no information. All who are poor, or in sorrow or affliction, have an equal claim upon us. It may be a titled lady who is smitten with fever sends for us, or it may be a common laundress or street sweeper. We care not, we ask no questions. Sorrow, pain are the appeals to which our doors never turn a deaf ear. We are pledged, we have made a vow, to suffering humanity; that it suffers is enough for us. Try to sleep now; that is best for you."

Beryl turned away and slept. Escape from the Roman, as

from all fevers, lies in the ability to sleep. She was young and strong, and she slept.

Sister Ursula sat beside her, watching, almost day and night, with that devotion which a trained and Heaven-born nurse alone can display; and when Beryl came out of that long sleep, her eyes rested upon the sweet and patient face of the woman who had crushed weariness under foot in her task of mercy and succour.

"You are better," said Sister Ursula. "In a few days you will be able to return to your friends."

Beryl was sitting up in bed, and at the sister's words her head drooped.

"I can never return," she answered. "To go back is impossible. If you knew—"

The sister passed her hand soothingly over Beryl's hot brow.

"I may know, or I may not," she said. "It does not matter."

"You know?" inquired Beryl. "You know what I am?"

The nurse averted her eyes. "I saw you as you passed out from a ball at the Quirinal," she said. "I know that you are of exalted rank—the Princess Beryl Carasca. I have seen your handwriting."

Beryl looked at her in amazement.

"My handwriting!" she said.

"Yes," replied Sister Ursula. "I wrote to Prince Carasca, asking him for a letter of recommendation. I was desirous of going to Africa. The letter came; it was in a lady's handwriting, and I was told that it must be from the Princess Beryl."

Beryl dropped back upon the pillow with a sigh. "I remember," she said. "Yes; I wrote that letter. And you are going to Africa?"

"Yes," said the sister. "It is the dream and ambition of my life."

Beryl turned over and closed her eyes, but she did not want to sleep, but to think. She envied Sister Ursula, for whom, through the tangled jungle of life, a path shone clearly. If she, Beryl, had only such a path open before her! She lay quite still for nearly an hour; then she turned and looked at the patient, black-robed figure seated beside the bed.

"You are going to Africa?" she asked.

Sister Ursula turned her placid eyes towards her. "Yes," she replied. "I am only waiting until you are well enough for me to leave you."

Beryl raised herself upon her elbow. "Will you take me with you?" she asked.

Her nurse looked at the fever-wasted face and unnaturally bright eyes with grave questioning.

"Will I take you with me?" she said. "My poor girl, you do not know what you ask! I am going into danger, perhaps to death itself."

"I do not care," returned Beryl.

"The work will be arduous, unceasing. There will be terrible sights—I shall have to attend the wounded and the dying. Think! Can you face all this?"

Beryl sat up and pushed the thick hair from her white and wan face.

"I can face anything," she said. "I do not fear danger, I have no fear of death. My greatest fear is of life, and the memory it brings. Take me with you, Sister Ursula, and I will try and help you to the best of my ability. I am ill and weak now, but I shall soon be well and strong. I was brought up in England, where women are strong and able to bear fatigue. I shall be no trouble to you—at least, I think and hope not. My own life is done with; it is past and gone forever. I want to be of some use in the world; I want to forget myself, and all that is past. There is no hope of happiness for me but in that. Take me with you!"

Sister Ursula rose. "Lie down again," she said. "I will take you with me if it be possible."

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CHAPTER XXXV.

LET us get back to Clive.

Fully convinced that he had, so to speak, "burnt his boats," and that he had lost Lady Blanche as well as Beryl—for, of course, she would accept Lord Clarence—why should she not?—he got into the dog-cart, and told the man to drive him back to Glengowrie. Arrived there, he amazed Lady Dorchester by informing her that he must go back to London at once.

Her ladyship was a good-natured woman, but she was, not unreasonably, a little annoyed at the young man's erratic movements, and stared at him over her knitting with something like a frown on her placid face.

"Why, gracious me!" she said. "You're only just ar-

rived! Have you had bad news—or what has happened?" she added, significantly.

Clive bit his lip. "All sorts of things can happen in a short time," Lady Dorchester," he said, evasively, as he glanced at his watch.

"Do you mean that Blanche has refused you?" she asked, with appalling candour.

"She hasn't—yet," said Clive. "But I am quite sure she would. I haven't asked her. She would be quite right to refuse such a worthless chap as I am."

"I don't know about that," remarked Lady Dorchester, with a candour still more appalling. "I am afraid she would be foolish enough to accept you. Clive, have you taken leave of your senses, quite gone out of your mind?"

"I don't know," replied Clive, rather wearily. "I don't think I ever had much mind to go out of; but I've sense enough to relieve you of my presence. In my present condition I should be like a skeleton at a feast here."

Lady Dorchester looked almost angry. "I don't know about skeletons," she said. "But I should like to be rude enough to say that you're acting like a fool."

"I agree with you, as I have always done, dear lady," answered Clive, as he held out his hand.

As she shook hands with him her good nature conquered, and her eyes softened with pity, for she was fond of Clive: a great many persons of both sexes were fond of Clive.

"Stay on," she said. "It may all come right."

He shook his head. "It can't come right; I'd better go."

His portmanteau was repacked, and put in the dog-cart, which he had still kept waiting, and he was driven to the station. As he was going to get his ticket, a horseman rode up to the station and hurried up the steps and to the booking-office, and laid his hand on Clive's shoulder at the moment he was asking for his ticket.

Clive turned and saw that it was Lord Clarence. The young fellow was hot, but pale, and there was a drawn look about his lips.

"Hold on, Marle," he said. "Don't take your ticket; I want to speak to you."

Clive followed him on to the platform. "What's the matter now?" he asked, with some impatience.

Lord Clarence set his face hard. "Look here, Marle," he said. "You needn't go; I was wrong in speaking to you as I did. I made a mistake."

"What do you mean?" asked Clive. "Look sharp; the train will be up directly."

"You won't go by this train," answered Lord Clarence.

"I've spoken to Lady Blanche!"

"Well?" demanded Clive, staring at him.

Lord Clarence stared before him sternly.

"And she refused me!"

Clive coloured. "Refused you?"

"Yes. You might just as well have gone on and proposed to her. You're her man, not I. You go back and ask them to send on my things; I'll go by this train."

Clive hesitated for a moment, then he said, hoarsely:

"I can't; you don't know! Go back, Clarence, and try your luck again."

Lord Clarence laughed bitterly. "No use," he said. "She wouldn't have me at any price! Better take the luck the gods have sent, Marle. She'll marry you, though you don't care a button for her. I know that!"

Olive shook his head. "You'll make her happier than I should," he declared. "For God's sake, don't tempt me! You talked like a man out there at the hut; you're talking like a fool now. I'm going by this train. Good-bye."

Even then Lord Clarence stretched out a hand to detain him; but Clive evaded it, and went for his ticket. The train came up, and Lord Clarence followed him to the door as he got in. It was evident that the young fellow was much moved by Olive's abnegation.

"You're doing a foolish thing, Marle," he said. "God help us both!"

"Amen!" responded Clive, cynically.

Lord Clarence wiped the sweat from his brow. "Women are the very devil!" he said.

"Amen!" responded Clive again. He shook hands with his unsuccessful rival, and the train started, leaving Lord Clarence gazing after it in a bewildered fashion.

Olive had plenty of time to think during the journey, for part of the way it was a slow train. He was very weary, but he was conscious of a faint feeling of satisfaction; for a man always feels satisfied with himself, however miserable he may be, when he has done the right thing. To have married Lady Blanche while he was in love—with what passionate love!—with Beryl Frayne, would have been a meanness not to be described.

But what lay before him? He was up to his neck in debt; his own estate was encumbered to the full; it was quite prob-

able that the marquis, when he heard that Clive had decided not to marry Lady Blanche, would discontinue his allowance. His creditors would drop down upon him like vultures. To remain in London, England even, was impossible. Where should he go, what should he do?

This question, which haunts most of us through this fitful fever which we call life, badgered him all the way up to London, and was still worrying him as he drove to his house in St. James's.

"Bring me the letters," he said to Parsons, as a greeting. It was just possible that Beryl had written to him. But the letters consisted only of invitations and bills; the latter were in a glorious majority. He dressed and went down to dine at the club. It was nearly empty, but, for a wonder, he found Lord Wally.

Lord Walter Sartoris accounted for his presence in the metropolitan desert in laconic but sufficiently graphic fashion.

"Got no money to go out of town with, dear boy," he said to Clive. "Quite stone-broke, assure you! Sick of the whole thing! If I could scrape enough money together, I'd go off to Africa, like the other fellow. There's some fun going on there, and a man had better be galloping about and fighting niggers than sweltering in this Gawd-forsaken hole."

The word Africa stuck to Clive's mind like a burr. He left the club, and wandered about the park, with his hands thrust in his pockets, and his head bent. A sudden resolution, an impulse, which was none the less strong for its springing from a harassed brain, got possession of him. Why shouldn't *he* go to Africa? There was no earthly good in his remaining in London, or, for that matter, in England.

In Africa he could at least do something that might be of service to his country; something that would carry him out of himself. If there should be any fighting over there, and a stray bullet should find him—well, all the better.

Almost mechanically, he walked towards Doyne House. The hall-porter said that the marquis was in, but, he believed, was just going out.

Clive went up slowly, with the heavy and dragging step, to the marquis's sitting-room. The inlaid table was strewn with letters of invitation, with cards of race meetings, with bills. He glanced at them with a feeling of nausea. At that moment he felt a disgust and loathing for the life which his noble uncle, the Marquis of Doyne, and he himself led. He went to the window, and, leaning against the frame, looked out on the hot street. Surely it would be better to take one's life in

one hands, to find some excuse for existence, in a barbarism which would be more healthy and ennobling than this existence, amidst an effete civilisation. Better anything than a life of vapid pleasure, shadowed by a cloud of duns.

The marquis entered, beautifully dressed and *débonnaire*. The news that his nephew had returned so quickly had filled him with raging disappointment, but there was no trace of either on his smooth face as, with a smile, he held out his white hand.

"Back already, Olive?" he said.

"Yes, I've come back, sir," replied Olive.

"Birds wild, too many guns, weather bad?" Doyne enquired.

"No; everything was all right," said the young man; "but I could not stay."

"Really?" returned the marquis, suavely. "How restless you are! Did you see Blanche? How is she?"

"I saw her only for a moment," said Olive. "She was quite well."

Doyne still smiled, but his eyes grew keen as they rested on the pale and weary face.

"Only for a moment? How was that?"

Olive was silent for a moment; then he said, for it was best to tell the truth:

"I went down to ask Blanche to be my wife; but I changed my mind."

His uncle sank into a chair, and looked up at him with a smile, but with a sharper keenness in his eyes.

"You changed your mind? May one ask why?"

"I couldn't propose to her because I love another woman," said Olive, looking straight before him.

Doyne laughed softly.

"My dear boy, we nearly always love another woman, we Marles especially; but we make good husbands, all the same. You'll forget the other woman when you have married Blanche."

"I think not, sir," said Olive; "that is why I did not propose to Blanche."

The marquis laughed.

"I am not given to prophesying," he said, "but I do venture to prophesy that you will marry her."

"You are wrong," returned Olive. "I never shall."

Doyne sat up, and looked at him steadily. Only a shadow of the famous smile remained.

"Indeed!" he said. "May I ask if you intend to marry

the other woman, and—I do not desire to appear inquisitive—who is she, may I ask?”

“It doesn’t matter,” said Clive. “She will not marry me.”

The marquis gazed at him, with a tightening of the lips, and a smile which was by no means pleasant.

“Then what do you intend to do?” he asked. “I am the least sordid of men, and I loathe the discussion of what the lower orders call ways and means, but, as your guardian, I feel constrained to remind you that your affairs are somewhat entangled, and that the only way of cutting the Gordian knot is by a good marriage, such as that with Blanche.”

“I know,” said Clive, wearily. “I have thought it all out.”

“Have you, really?” asked the marquis. “I should have thought such a mental process would have brought you to your senses. What do you intend to do?”

“I am going to Africa!” replied Clive.

“A charming country,” sneered Doyne. “The paradise of the Jew financier, the raff and the illicit diamond buyer. May one ask under which of these characters you intend to voyage?”

“I shall join a troop of horse there,” said Clive.

“Oh!” exclaimed the marquis. “You’ll find it difficult to obtain a commission; as a rule, they go to men in the service. You are not in the service.”

“I shall join as a common trooper,” returned Clive. “Many better than I have done so!”

“I think that is quite possible,” responded Doyne, cynically. “My dear Clive, if it were not impolite, I should like to remark that you are a fool. No one but a fool would throw up such a future as lies before you. You are heir to the title and estates which I so unworthily hold. You can have the most beautiful and the wealthiest girl in the world for your wife; you elect to throw aside these advantages, and to play the raff amongst the scum and outcasts of Europe. Very good! I need not say that, if you adhere to this resolution, I, in the words of the melodrama, have done with you. Go to Africa, or the devil, it matters not to me. All I ask you is, that, when you have plunged into this idiotic life, you will try to remember that you are a member of an old and not undistinguished family, and that you will endeavour to stain its annals as little as possible. I have done with you. I reflect, with profound regret, that I have just paid into your bankers your last allowance. That it will be your last I need scarcely say. What the devil you will do I do not know, and, to be

frank, I do not very much care. I should be sorry to hurry you, but I am going to drive to Richmond, and I am already late."

Clive drew himself up. Every word the marquis had uttered in his soft and musical voice had struck home. "I am going, sir," he said; "before I go, I want to thank you for your kindness, your liberality towards me. God knows when we shall meet again!"

Doyne smiled bitterly.

"Forgive me, but I have no desire for the acquaintance of an African trooper. I have many friends, mostly men of honour. I always avoid a fool when I recognise him."

Clive bit his lip. "Very well, sir," he said. "Good-bye!"

As he moved towards the door he paused; but his uncle had sunk back into his chair, and was passing his scented handkerchief over his lips. He was looking across the park, as if Clive were not present. His face was pale, his lips drawn tightly, but there was an expression in his eyes which indicated that, so far as Clive was concerned, with him and his future, he, the Marquis of Doyne, had no concern.

Clive went back to his rooms with a heavy heart. You may be up to your neck in sorrow, you may be careless and indifferent as to what becomes of you, but you cannot part with the man who has stood as father and guardian to you as long as you can remember without compunction.

He felt very much of an outcast as he left Doyne House.

One takes the most stupendous journeys nowadays without much personal effort. Clive told Parsons to pack the overland trunk with absolute necessities; he gave that faithful servant a year's salary in advance and notice of dismissal.

"Why can't I come with you, my lord?" asked Parsons, with a suspicious thickness in his voice.

"Going to Africa, Parsons," said Clive.

"You'll want a man in Africa, my lord," remarked Parsons, huskily; but Clive shook his head.

"I'm going to rough it, Parsons," he said. "And I shouldn't know what to do with you. You look out for a quiet little pub. somewhere. I know you've saved money. I may be back some day, and if I come back, and want you, and you are still at liberty, I'll send for you."

"No man ever had so good a master," said Parsons in a choked voice.

His grief did not interfere with the efficient performance of his duties, and he had the mournful satisfaction of seeing his

beloved master off by the mail which left for Africa the next morning.

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CHAPTER XXXVI.

"SOME day some chap who knows all about it will rise up and write the history of the British in South Africa; and when he does—I mean the real history—it will make people sit up and howl. At present they don't know anything about it; most folks are under the impression that we are out here on a kind of perpetual picnic with lobster salad and '89 champagne; why, in my last letter from my folks at home, the dear old mother said that she hoped that I was enjoying myself! Enjoying myself!"

The speaker, a stalwart young fellow, with a handsome but powder-begrimed face, looked round at his companions with a grim smile. They were camping for the night in the ruins of what had once—indeed, only a few days before—been a flourishing farm-house; but the Basutos had broken out into a little rebellion, and had playfully swooped down upon the farm, murdered the occupants, and burnt the house. Then the South African troopers had come upon them in their triumph, and had cut it short in the pleasant little way the South African trooper has. The fight had gone on until darkness had rendered fighting impossible; the Basutos had retired, dragging their wounded after them, and leaving their dead to be buried by their foes, and the troopers had gone back to the ruined farm to snatch a few hours of rest before setting off in pursuit of the enemy.

The interior of the still smoking hut—for it was one of the farm out-buildings—would have furnished a very pretty and striking picture for a modern Rembrandt. The sarcastic speaker was seated on an upturned biscuit box, examining an assegai wound which looked ugly in the light of the fire over which the evening meal was cooking; round this fire sat or lay his companions: most of them were examining old or fresh wounds. One young fellow now and again tried to smother a groan with a cough. They were all fearfully dirty, their faces were so begrimed that it would have been impossible to tell the fair from the dark; their uniforms were torn by the thorny bush through which they had ridden, and in which they had fought for so many terrible but glorious hours.

But though they were tired and most of them wounded,

and all of them hungry, they were by no means gloomy or low-spirited. The man who was presiding over the culinary operations whistled cheerfully as he stirred the pot with a peeled stick; one young fellow sang "Daisy Bell," that soul-melting ballad having just reached South Africa; two men, sitting as near the light of the fire as possible, were playing écarté with a pack of cards from which the King of Diamonds, the Ace of Spades and the Queen of Hearts were missing.

The group consisted of many types. The majority of them were young, very young; most of them were gentlemen; a few of them were regular soldiers who had des—, pardon! exchanged for the South African troopers. A great many of them bore false names. Curiosity was sternly repressed amongst them; no man ever dreamt of being guilty of the impertinence of asking his fellow-trooper any questions as to his real name and position, because he knew that he would only get lies. Each respected the reticence of the rest, feeling that he had need for a similar respect. The young fellow on the biscuit box was the younger son of a well-known peer with a seat in the Cabinet; the cook was a cadet of a noble family with which he had quarrelled; the two men playing cards had run for Sandhurst, been "chucked," and—here they were. Nothing in that history which the man on the biscuit box had foretold will prove more striking than the fact that South Africa was won for the "Widow at Windsor" by a set of Englishmen little more than boys in years, and nearly all of them of rank and good breeding.

"Isn't that mess which you insult us by calling a stew nearly ready, Bourke?" enquired one of the men, stifling a yawn, and rubbing his short hair impatiently.

"Don't you worry," retorted Bourke. "The blessed stuff's scarcely hot yet. I hope there'll be enough to go round. Are we all here?" He glanced about him with the anxiety of the caterer who is not quite sure of his quantity.

"All but Burton," was the reply. "He's on guard."

"He ought to be relieved," said a young fellow who was the lieutenant. "He fought like a madman all day, and must be about knocked up. Go and relieve him, Gordon. Wait; you'd better get a bit of supper first."

"Oh, I'll do; I've got a biscuit," responded Gordon, cheerfully. "You fellows can save me a snack, if there's enough." He got up, munching at his biscuit, saluted the officer, and went out as uncomplainingly as if he'd not been fighting for seven mortal hours.

The man on the biscuit box looked after him thoughtfully.

"Yes, Burton fought like a madman; that's the word for it," he said. "One of the characters in 'Hamlet' remarks that all the English are mad; and, upon my soul, it's about the truest thing Shakespeare ever wrote."

"Brown's going to lecture," remarked one of the card-players. "Reserved seats, half-a-crown."

"Well, it's true," resumed Brown, quite unmoved by the friendly sarcasm. "Just think of the place we're in. A couple of Englishmen, only a couple, mind you, come out here and stick up a farm in the midst of a wild bush, and surrounded by natives, like the sand of the sea for multitude. Any sane person could come and chaw them up; but these two men are Englishmen, and they go to work blandly, like a couple of simple children, or trustful idiots, grub up the scrub, work all the flesh off their bones in tilling the land, build a decent house, and behave as if they were farming in all the security of one of the home counties. Meanwhile, the wily native sits around on his haunches and waits. He knows, bless him, that the two idiots will send for their wives and children, who will bring out all sorts of things which the soul of the native loveth; and so he waits; and, of course, the two idiots *do* send for their wives and children, who arrive with abundant stores and supplies. Then the native comes down in his joy, and has a high old time of it. He murders the families with care and despatch, burns the farms, and slopes with everything he can carry."

"End of act one," remarked the card-player.

"Quite so," said Brown. "Then *we* come on the scene. Any other nation would have started us here before the farm was burnt and mischief done; but we English like arriving after the affair is over, so we come in time to bury our countrymen, the simple farmer, and then start to wallop the nigger."

"End of act two," remarked the card-player. "Cut it short, Brown; I can't play while you cackle; I've just chucked away two points."

"Act three is a farce," said Brown. "We come up with the wily native and his thousands, and we corpse a hundred or two; the remainder go on their way, more or less rejoicing, to play the same game in another place just out of our reach. Over there, at home, they talk, and write in the newspapers, about the colonisation of Africa, of 'opening up new fields for commerce and enterprise,' of 'Britain's noble sons.' Quite so. But they forget, they don't take count of, the

many noble sons who get stuck in the gizzard and knocked on the head, who die of fever rot in this colonisation business. I tell you that every foot of this place is moistened with English blood."

"Good old phrase!" said a young fellow. "You ought to write an Adelphi drama, old chap."

But Brown was not to be choked off.

"Just think of the fellows we have lost in this business alone," he began again, and his voice dropped for a moment. "Where's Parker, and Johnson, and Wilmington, and the rest of them? I knew some of them in the old country; was at school with two or three of them. What about their mothers? Most of us have got mothers. It's all very well for the newspaper chaps; but what about the old folks at home?"

"Go to blazes, you old croaker!" exclaimed a young fellow, with a laugh; but the laugh was unsteady, and his lip quivered; he had one leg stretched out straight, and there was a very nasty cut in it.

"It's all very well preaching," observed the cook, as he ladled out the stew, "but what's your remedy? what do you propose?"

"Who the devil am I, that I should propose?" retorted Brown. "I'm only a common trooper; I'm not the boss that runs the show. But, look here! If I were, I'd run it in a different way from this. If I wanted to collar a new country—for that's what it amounts to—I'd do it in a sensible, business-like way; I'd do it wholesale, not piecemeal."

"Silence for Brown's proposal!" cried the young fellow with the bad leg.

"I'd land ten thousand troops," said Brown. "I'd say, 'Good-morning! we want this place, we mean to have it. If you want to fight, come on; but it won't be any use; we're too many for you. If they fought, we should lick them right away, and things would be settled at once; the country would be ours; the natives would be disarmed, and Christianity and civilisation, and all the rest of it could sail in smiling.'"

"Yes, that's all very well," remarked the card-player. "You'd employ the regular army; where would the likes of us come in?"

"You don't come in," retorted Brown, "you get out; you peter out one by one, and the regulars have to come in after all. It's a waste of life. Oh, yes; I'm aware that life isn't very valuable to some of us; still, there it is; and the worst of us is too good for assegai targets. Look at this chap, Burton, who is just coming in."

"How can we look at him till he does come in, you idiot?" demanded the card-player, facetiously; but Brown refused to be silenced.

"I should like to know where you'd find a better specimen of an Englishman than that?"

"Oh, Burton's all right," said the young fellow with the bad leg.

Brown snorted. "Right! I should think so. He's the best of this bunch; and we ain't a bad lot, take us bye and large."

"Oh, thanks!" drawled the card-player, with exaggerated gratitude.

"He's a man any country would be proud of. He's a horn soldier—oh, I know he hasn't been in the service, but he's a soldier for all that—nothing comes amiss to him; he'll fight all day; he'll starve all night, without a word or a murmur. He'll share his rations with a chum, or, for that matter, with a stranger. In short," he lowered his voice, "he's an English gentleman. He stands in with the rest of us for so many bob a day. He fights like a Trojan; and as sure as I'm sitting on this box, he'll get stuck, or knocked on the head, and a good man will be wasted."

"He's a good man enough," said the young fellow with the leg.

Brown snorted again.

"He's just the type I'm preaching about," he said.

"All right," returned the card-player. "Bring your sermon to a close, old chap, and pronounce the benediction. Burton stands in with the rest of us, and we shall all of us get stuck or knocked on the head ultimately, I daresay. Has any one got any salt? No? How I do hate stew without salt! Have you left some for Burton?" he added, addressing the cook. "He must be worn out, and as hungry as a rat in a church!"

As he spoke, a tall figure entered the hut. He walked slowly, and with a weariness which he tried to conceal. His erect figure was silhouetted by the firelight; his face, like those of his comrades, was begrimed and blackened by powder and dust; he was as thin as a greyhound, and the hand which held his rifle was browned by the African sun; from a wound on his head, the blood had trickled and set across his face; one sleeve was red, and thickened from an assegai thrust in his arm. He was so thin, so changed, that even the Marquis of Doyme would have found it difficult to recognise in the gaunt

figure, the blood-stained face, that of his nephew, Lord Clive Marle.

He was very tired, rather sick with the loss of blood, with the tramp, tramp of his guard; but he looked round and nodded with a smile. Englishmen are hard to beat, and when the worst comes to the worst they always manage a smile. The men turned to him with various greetings, but with a unanimous welcome.

"Come in, Burton!" said the card-player, facetiously. "Will you take this easy-chair, or would you like a sofa? Dinner is just served. Permit me to present you with the *menu*. Soup à la Française. Ragout of old boots. I think it is old boots by the flavour. Wine *aqua de pura*! In plain English, what Wilson, here, calls a stew. Come and sit down and enjoy yourself, old man!"

Olive sank down beside the fire; he had found it cold outside in the darkness.

Brown got off his biscuit box, and went to him.

"Did you get hurt to-day, Burton?" he asked.

"Not at all, thanks," answered Olive.

Brown touched the stiffened sleeve, and looked at the blood-stained face significantly; but Clive smiled and shook his head.

"A mere nothing," he said, "only a scratch. When do we go on?"

"You seem eager for business," remarked Brown.

Olive shrugged his shoulders as, with a "Thanks!" he took the tin bowl of stew which the cook handed him. "We ought to get up with those fellows, and settle them once for all," he said; "they'll do more mischief, if we don't."

"You seem hard to satisfy, Burton!" exclaimed the young fellow with the game leg. "I should have thought you would have had enough to-day."

Olive smiled. "If the light hadn't gone, we should have settled them once and for all," he said. "Give them time to rally, and we shall have to begin all over again."

"Just what I said," remarked Brown, with profound satisfaction. "Is there any water?"

A man produced about half a pint in a tin can. Brown took it to Olive.

"Thought you'd like to wash your face," he said.

"Thanks; I'd rather drink it," said Olive; and he drank it. He tried to eat the stew, but he had gone beyond eating. He was tired to death; and presently he drew himself beyond the reach of the fierce rays of the fire, and, with his arm for a

pillow, tried to sleep. But, for a time, sleep evaded him. He thought he was back in the Enchanted Valley, that he was so tired that he could not throw a fly, and Beryl was laughing at him. He saw her distinctly; she was looking at him with a smile in her beautiful eyes, with her soft red lips apart, as if mocking, yet pitying, his weariness.

He set his lips tight, for they seemed to frame the word "Beryl" against his will. One of the men had tossed him a blanket, and he drew it over his face and eyes, to shut out, if possible, the lovely vision. His head, his arm with its nasty wound, plagued and tormented him; but presently he fell asleep. Even in his sleep the vision of Beryl haunted him. At one moment he felt her in his arms, and he stretched them out with a wistful moan. Brown, to whom sleep came only in intervals, walked over and looked at him, shook his head and went back to his pillow—to wit, the biscuit box. The rest of the men were sleeping soundly, the sleep which comes from sheer exhaustion and burnt-out excitement.

As the dawn began to creep, thief-like, into the sky, there came the sound of horsemen, and the troopers' horses neighed a welcome. The sound ceased just outside the hut; two figures stood silhouetted in the firelight. One was that of a middle-sized man, with a young and almost boyish face, which, for all its apparent youthfulness, had the expression of a commander. The man beside him was young, dark, and graceful. The smaller one of the two advanced; and, as he entered the hut, the men awoke, as if touched by electricity. It was their general, the man who had risen from the status of a simple doctor to the position of commander. He looked round the hut with a faint smile; then, as he met the awakened eyes, he said:

"Good-evening, boys!"

His voice was clear and calm, but it had within its register a certain something, call it electric if you will, which exercised an effect upon the hearers difficult to describe.

All sprang to their feet and saluted. Olive was the last to rise; but when he had done so his figure stood erect above the others; the Marles were always tall.

The commander, "the General," as they loved to call him, looked round. His comprehensive eye took in the whole scene—the blood stains from the numerous wounds, the begrimed faces, the weary forms standing before him.

"You've done well to-day, men!" he said. "I'm sorry I was not with you! The enemy has gone westward. We shall have to follow. There is a station, a nest of farms, out there

figure, the blood-stained
Marie.

He was very tired, and
the tramp, tramp of his
feet with a snore. But
the worst comes to the
The men turned to him
unanimous welcome.

"Come in, Burton

"Will you take this
Dinner is just served
menu. Soup *à la Fra*
it is old boots by the fl
English, what Wilson,
and enjoy yourself, old

Clive sank down be
side in the darkness.

Brown got off his hat

"Did you get hurt

"Not at all, thank

Brown touched the
stained face signifi-
cantly.

"A mere nothing
we go on?"

"You seem eager

Clive shrugged his
the tin bowl of soup
ought to get up with
all," he said; "thank

"You seem happy
fellow with the
would have had a

Clive smiled.
settled themselves once
rally, and we shall

"Just what I
expectation. Is it

A man produced
took it to Clive.

"I thought you

"Thank you, I

it. He tried to

He was a bit of a
the head of the

one by courtesy, and the general saw that it was imperatively necessary to call a halt. The horses were placed in charge of the natives, and the troopers, dropping from their saddles, threw themselves on the ground. Hubert stretched himself beside Clive; he had carried a cloak strapped to his saddle, and, unbuckling it, he flung half of it over his companion's tall figure. Clive was almost too exhausted to thank him, and in less than two minutes was fast asleep. The dawn was breaking when the men were awakened, a cold and unsatisfactory breakfast was served out, the horses were watered and rubbed down, and, in less than half an hour from their rising, the troopers were again on the march. The night had been cold, and Clive was stiff; there was a dull aching in one or two of his various wounds; he was not disposed to conversation, but he thanked Hubert for half the cloak.

"Ah, don't speak of it!" said the latter. "If it had been yours instead of mine, you would have shared it with me."

As Clive could not deny this, he remained silent. As before, the two men rode side by side. They felt strangely drawn towards each other; perhaps because they were about the same age; perhaps—who knows?—because they were both suffering from heart trouble: your disappointed lover is a sympathetic animal.

They made their way through the bush, the men cheerful enough, though swearing at intervals; then they opened on to the veldt again, and, crossing it, came into a ravine, on either side of which rose hills covered with broken rock and stunted scrub.

"Fine cover for the enemy," remarked Clive. "If these fellows only took advantage of their opportunities, they could wipe us out in a month or two."

The general rode back to them. "The scouts tell me that the place we are making for is just at the end of this," he said. "If it is really threatened, the enemy should be hereabouts. Are you all ready?"

The count and Clive saluted, and the general rode along the file, putting his significant question.

When they had wound through the ravine for about two miles, Clive, whose eyes were like unto the hawk's for keenness and swiftness, saw a thin streak of smoke rising against the blue.

"That's the settlement," he said to Hubert, nodding in the direction of the smoke.

"Better tell the general," said the other. Clive rode forward. The general nodded.

"Right!" he said; and, a moment after, he added: "And there's the enemy!"

As he spoke, something flashed from the hillside, and one of the troopers flung up his arms.

"They've got rifles," remarked the general, gravely.

An assegai hurtled through the air, and fell in the middle of the column, causing two of the horses to shy and rear; several dusky figures incautiously showed themselves above the rocks, but leapt with a yell into the air as some of the troopers picked them off.

"We've got to fight through this before we reach the settlement," remarked the general, cheerfully. He glanced over his men, and nodded with the air of a ball-steward inviting the men to take their partners for the next dance. The men neither shouted nor cheered—it wasn't time for that yet—but they brightened up and felt for their revolvers and tightened their reins as they rode forward.

The ravine began to open; Clive could see a small clearing, from which rose the wattled roofs of farm buildings. As if in mockery of the spirit of war, the golden grain, sown with such perseverance and pluck, with a sanguineness which is the birthright of the Briton and the American alone, waved in the autumn breeze; but, every now and then, in strange discordance with its surroundings, there shot forth a tongue of flame from somewhere behind the golden grain, and a bullet sped across the smiling yellow. It was War in the midst of Peace.

Clive's sharp, keen eyes saw something else beside the waving crop, and the spitting flames from the Winchesters; it was a woman's skirt fluttering on a line beside one of the houses.

"There are women there," he said, to Hubert.

Hubert nodded. "Shall we be in time, shall we get through, Burton?" he asked. "I beg your pardon; Burton is your name, I believe?"

Clive nodded shortly. "Yes; that's my name. What is yours?"

"I'm called Hubert by my friends. Permit me to claim you as one."

Clive made the reluctant consent of the shy Englishman. Englishmen are slow to make friends of strangers; but he had grown to like this man, who had made overtures of friendship in so frank and boyish a manner.

The general rode up and down, and, as he passed the two, he said a word.

"Don't waste your cartridges, we shall want them presently."

Olive and Hubert saluted, for they understood. The real fight would take place close to the farm.

While I have been writing—and how long it takes to write when such action is in process!—the troopers had been pressing forward. Every now and then a bullet from the foe hidden by the rocks on the hills had wounded or dropped a man from their ranks, and they had replied with more or less effect. But now, as they attained the end of the ravine, a dusky mass came swirling and swooping from behind a shoulder of the hill, and stood solidly before them.

"Thank God, they've come into the open!" said Olive; "if they'd remained up there, they could have picked us off one by one; but we can meet them now on equal ground!"

"Forward, lads!" cried the general.

The men responded with a shout—it was time now to cheer—and bore down upon the savage mass as if they had been discharged from a catapult.

Is there any man alive who can describe such a fight? If so, it is only the man who has taken part in it. And how much does even he see of it? Little or nothing. He looks straight before him; fires and cuts and thrusts in a blind rage which runs like molten fire through his overcharged veins. There is something before him which he has to beat down, to overcome, to kill. He does not think of his own life; all he desires is the death, the annihilation of the foe.

War is utterly unlike the pictures of it which we at home pore over in the illustrated papers. In reality, it is nothing like those same pictures. It is a struggle for life between two forces who have no regard whatever for the pictorial or the picturesque. They fight, and they yell like demons; their faces are black with powder and dust and sweat; their faces are distorted by passion at which hell itself might stand aghast; theirs is a thirst for blood blazing like lurid flames in their distended eyes. Every nerve, every sense is concentrated upon one effort—to kill, kill, kill!

Olive fought that sunlit morning as he always fought—like a demon. He was utterly regardless of his own life. Between him and that settlement, that lonely spot, with its woman's skirt swaying in the breeze, stood a dusky mass which he had, somehow or other, to cut through.

Gradually he fought his way into the midst of the foe. He was surrounded on all sides, assegais hurtled over him; he could feel the blood running warmly down his arm; it blinded one eye as it poured from a wound in his forehead; but with the other he saw clearly enough, and as he thrust and fired at

the dusky forms which swarmed round him, that eye sought now and again the woman's skirt stirring in the breeze.

Amidst the yells of the Basutos, the shouts and cheers, the imprecations and the laughter—yes, the laughter—for even the English at such moments become hysterical—he seemed to hear the wail of women's voices.

Suddenly, with an unexpectedness which amazed him, he found himself thrusting and striking at nothing. He had forced his way through. He dashed the blood from his eyes and looked round; two or three of his fellow-troopers were beside him; even as he became conscious of their presence, one man gasped, threw up his arms, and fell from the saddle.

Clive looked round. He and some of his fellows had cut, forced, thrust themselves through the serried, dusky ranks; but the rest of the troop had not been so fortunate. His comprehensive glance, sweeping over the riot of the battle, fixed itself on a group to the left.

A score or more of blacks had surrounded a trooper who, in the frenzy of battle, had become cut off from the troop. He was still mounted, and was firing and cutting with all the desperation of a man who is fighting for dear life; and his situation looked perfectly hopeless. As Clive gazed, he saw that it was the companion of his march, the man who had given him a drink from his flask, had offered him a cigarette, and shared his cloak with him. Clive struck his spurs into his horse, and recharged his revolver as he rode forward and rode back.

"Hi! Come back!" yelled the few troopers who had won their way through beside him.

Clive still rode on, and was in the midst of the group before he scarcely knew it.

The foe greeted him with a yell of defiance. They were men worth fighting, and they did not give an inch before the mad and furious charge which carried him amongst them; but presently he forced his way through the yelling demons right up to the side of Count Hubert.

"Get away!" he cried to him; for he saw that all Hubert's cartridges had gone, and that he was making play with the butt-end of his rifle.

Hubert laughed. "No, I stay where you have come!" he said—gasped, rather.

Clive fired right and left and struck left and right. A devil's strength seemed to possess his wiry, muscular arm. The foe bent backwards, just as the grain within sight of

them was bent by the wind; they fell beneath him, man by man, and those who were still standing yielded inch by inch.

"We'll go now!" shouted Clive, as he saw fresh foes pressing forward.

"Come, then!" cried Hubert; "I will not go without you!"

Clive turned his horse. Blood was streaming from its chest and flanks. Hubert swung round at the same moment, and the two men were making for their comrades, when an assegai, flung by a kneeling Basuto, caught Clive full in the breast. He swayed in the saddle, gripped it with both hands, set his teeth hard, and thrust his spurs into his horse. But the assegai had struck too deep, blood was pouring down its shaft. A darkness, like the darkness of death, spread before him, shutting out the foe, the settlement, the woman's skirt.

He fought in vain against the weakness which assailed him, and he swayed to and fro in the saddle like a drunken man. But even at that moment he felt, rather than knew, that some one had seized his bridle. He tried to smile, but the smile wavered on his lips and they fell apart feebly. Then he fell forward, and the darkness enveloped him as in a cloud; and, as the American humourist remarks "the subsequent proceedings interested him no more."

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CHAPTER XXXVIII.

A WEEK later the black-robed figure of a woman stood in the doorway of the farm-house which the troopers had saved from destruction.

The sun was shining brightly over the wattled roofs and the waving corn; an air of peace, contrasting strongly with the late din of battle, the cries of wounded men, the imprecations of the fighting animals, brooded over the scene; fowls pecked and scratched round Sister Ursula's feet, a flight of pigeons rose above her head; some children of the small settlement shouted merrily in a copse near at hand; and every now and then the low of a cow made a music not unpleasant to the ear.

Sister Ursula looked round her with her patient eyes, and stretched out her arm as if she were taking in the restful atmosphere, the soft incense of the peaceful and prosperous surroundings. As she stood thus, another black-robed figure came from one of the outbuildings, and, crossing the courtyard, joined her. This other figure was slighter than that of

Sister Ursula, and possessed a grace which even the nun-like garb could not altogether conceal. The snowy band of linen framed a face which any artist—Boughton, for instance—would have delighted to transfer to his canvas. Sister Ursula, though she saw it daily, never ceased to admire it; but she now only remarked its pallor.

"Is all going well, Sister Marie?" she asked.

Beryl nodded, and came and stood beside her companion, leaning against the door-frame, and letting her hands lie loosely clasped before her.

"Yes, I think so—hope so," she said.

"You are looking pale. Have you had a hard night?"

"Two of the men were in pain, and did not sleep," replied Beryl; "but they have fallen asleep now. You sent for me?"

"Yes," said Sister Ursula. "I thought you ought to have a little fresh air; you have been shut up there too long."

"I must not stay many minutes," answered Beryl. "My patients may wake, and I don't like trusting them to Gretchen, good though she is. How sweet and peaceful it is out here! It's hard to believe that only a week ago the place was like hell; I can scarcely realise that there are wounded men lying so near us, and that we have buried so many in the little clearing there. It is fortunate that we came here just when we did; it was a mere chance, was it not?"

"I don't believe in chance," replied Sister Ursula. "I think we should call it by another name—Providence. Do you think it was chance, Marie, only chance, that led your feet to the Church of St. Andrea, that took me there just when you needed me? Is it chance that has brought us out here into these wilds, to arrive at the very moment when we could be of some use? What would these poor fellows have done if there had been no one here to nurse them?"

"There would have been a great many more mounds in the little clearing," said Beryl, sadly, yet gratefully. "How is your patient getting on?"

Sister Ursula looked before her with a tender kind of gravity.

"I scarcely know," she said. "He has been lying between life and death ever since he was carried in here. The wound was a frightful one, and it makes me shudder when I think of it, when I dress it; it would have killed most men. And it was not the only one."

"He has suffered a great deal?" asked Beryl.

"Terribly; but he is not in so much pain now; but he's worn out by suffering and weakness. Yet he is so patient.

That's the best of nursing a strong man. He is full of consideration for me and tries to hide his agonies; sometimes he will try and whistle or sing, when I know that he is suffering acutely; and he will very often pretend that he is asleep, hoping that I shall be induced to get some rest. He is the most interesting patient I have ever had, and it is a melancholy pleasure to nurse him."

"He is an Englishman, I think you said?" remarked Beryl.

"Yes; and a gentleman, as most of them were. He says his name is Burton, but I think that nearly all the troopers were fighting under an *alias*, and had a history which they came to Africa to escape, and, if possible, to forget."

"Does he say anything of himself, of his past?" asked Beryl.

They say that, when an actor takes a holiday, he goes to see a play; that when a 'bus-driver gets a day off, he spends it sitting beside another driver, sometimes on the old, familiar route. Beryl had a few minutes' holiday, and she spent them in talking and taking an interest in Sister Ursula's patient.

"No," replied Sister Ursula, "he says nothing. Once or twice, in his delirium, he mentioned places and people's names. He is a man of rank, I think."

Beryl asked no question as to the names which the sick man has spoken; it was against the rules of the Nursing Sisters to repeat what they heard in delirium; indeed, they were taught and strictly enjoined to forget everything that escaped their patients in their ravings.

"Do you think he will recover?" asked she.

"I do not know," said Ursula. "A doctor might tell; I cannot. I hope and trust that he will, for I have taken a deep interest in him. I cannot help it; there is something about him which"—she sought for a word—"gets on one's nerves, as you say. It is an English expression, and a very graphic one. He has got on my nerves, and when he is asleep, or pretending to be, I find myself"—her voice dropped—"praying for him unconsciously."

Beryl sighed. "You are so good, Sister Ursula," she replied in a low voice; "you find it easy to pray!"

Ursula turned her serene and peaceful eyes upon the pale and beautiful face beside her.

"And you, my child?" she said, laying her hand on Beryl's arm.

Beryl sighed again. "I am not good," she answered. "Sister Marie!"

Beryl shook her head; her lips trembled, and her brows grew straight. "I am not good," she repeated. "You told me, there, in the Sisters' Home, that I should forget the past, that my work would bring peace of mind and contentment. I suppose if I were good, it would have done so; but it hasn't. You are content and happy."

"Peace will come in time, Sister Marie," said Ursula, gently, pityingly.

Beryl smiled. "Death comes in time," she said in her turn. "I must go back."

She drew round her the cloak which fluttered in the soft breeze, and Sister Ursula watched her affectionately as the slim figure crossed the courtyard and disappeared through the doorway of the outbuilding, which had been turned into a hospital. Along both sides of the bare room were ranged beds formed of rough planking, upon which were stretched wounded troopers and Basutos, who, foes in health, but friends in sickness, received equal attention from their devoted nurses. A double row of eyes turned to greet the sweet face of the sister as she passed down the room. The blacks watched her silently, but some of the troopers spoke, and one of them said, between gasps of pain, "Back already! Why the Moses couldn't you stop out in the fresh air a little while, Sister Marie? We could have got on very well without you for an hour or two, and this isn't a fit place for a young lady to coop herself up in!"

Beryl bent over him and smiled.

"An hour or two! Why, you've managed to wriggle your bandage off in these few minutes. Let me put it straight for you."

The man held out his wounded arm grudgingly but gratefully.

"Don't trouble about the plaguey thing," he said; "there are some here who want you worse than I do." He nodded towards the bed beside which Gretchen, the farmer's daughter, sat. Beryl crossed over.

"He's very ill, sister," said Gretchen in a guttural whisper. "He's worse since you left."

The man was tossing his head to and fro, his face was ashen, his lips writhing, and he was quite unconscious.

"You can go now, Gretchen," said Beryl, and she sat down beside the bed, and bathed the man's forehead. He fell asleep after a time, and she went from bed to bed, adjusting a bandage here, giving a drink of cool water there, bringing hope and consolation to every man she approached. The day

grew on; towards evening, as the shadows fell upon the room, Beryl saw that the man whom she had left to Gretchen's care was growing worse. Her surgical skill was small compared with that of Sister Ursula, and she decided to send for her. There were one or two children of the farm clustered silently at the door, and she sent one of them for the other sister.

Sister Ursula came in, and Beryl, with a significant gesture, motioned towards the dying man. Sister Ursula nodded.

"I will stay here," she said; "you go over to Burton. Send Gretchen to me with fresh lint."

Beryl left the hospital and crossed the courtyard, found Gretchen, and despatched her with the lint, then went upstairs to the room in which Sister Ursula's patient lay.

It was almost dark by this time, and she had to feel her way up the broad, rough-hewn stairs; but a candle was burning in the sick-room, and she made her way to the bed. The wounded man was lying quite motionless, and Beryl, thinking that he was asleep, removed the candle, so that its dim and flickering light should not fall upon his eyes. She examined, with a nurse's eyes, the bowls and bandages on the chest of drawers, poured out fresh water, and soaked some lint ready for use; then went and sat down beside the bed. The room seemed very quiet and cool, compared with the hospital which she had left, and she leant back and closed her eyes, but with no intention of sleeping, although she was tired enough, Heaven knows!

She never sat thus, never closed her eyes in waking moments, without going back to the past. She was back now at Trentishoe; she was fishing in the Heddon; there was a large trout just under a bush on the other side of the river, and she was trying to cover it with one of her best and most enticing flies. And Clive was standing beside her and watching her; she could hear his subdued laughter, his tenderly-mocking voice, saying, "You'll never get him, Beryl; he's too leary. He knows too much about women to trust even Beryl Frayne!"

She could hear his voice quite plainly and distinctly; she could see the river as it swirled beneath a boulder; could feel the moorland air fanning her cheek. She knew that it was only a mirage of the past; but, unreal as it was, it brought her a sad kind of happiness. If one could only spend all one's life dreaming of past happiness!

She closed her eyes again, and went back to the Enchanted Valley. She had not forgotten her patient, and his slightest movement would have recalled her from her dream of the past to her duties of the present; but he did not move for

some time, and she was wandering over Brendon Moor with Clive by her side, when suddenly a voice said:

"Are you there, Sister Ursula?"

Beryl did not start, but something seemed to go through her like the thrust of a knife. She opened her eyes and sat upright, and her hands fell to her side, as if they were helpless.

For the voice which had come from the wounded man was like that of Clive himself. For a moment her heart was beating, and her breath failed her, the voice was so fearfully like his.

She sat bolt upright, fighting against the delusion. It was so easy to explain it. She had been thinking, dreaming, of Clive; it was not to be wondered at that the voice—a man's—which struck athwart her dreams should seem like his. It was difficult to speak; for a moment or two—only a moment or two—her tongue refused its office; then, reproaching herself for her wild fancy, she said, without turning towards the bed:

"Yes, I am here."

As she spoke, she waited for the man's further speech with an anxiety, a fear which made her tremble. She heard him turn his head.

"You are back soon—or is it soon?" he asked. "I fancy I've been asleep; I'm not sure."

Beryl's hand stole softly to her heart. Was she really asleep and dreaming, or was this some terrible hallucination? For the voice was the voice of Clive. She tried to drive it, to smile it away, with self-scorn for her weakness. She had not had any sleep or rest for some days; this was a chimera of an overworn brain; she must get some sleep to-night, if only for an hour or two, or she would be unfit for work. To be unfit for work is reckoned a deadly sin by the Nursing Sisters.

"You have been asleep, I hope?" she enquired, in a voice so strained that it was unlike her own.

The wounded man looked at her; she felt, she did not see his eyes upon her.

"Why didn't you stop out?" he asked. "It's a deadly shame your sticking in here hour after hour, day after day, in this wretched room. It ought not to be allowed. It makes me ashamed of myself, and I spend most of my time asking myself why the dev—I beg your pardon, Sister Ursula; don't you mind me!—why I can't die and let you get some rest. It must be cool and pleasant enough outside; I wish you'd go and take a walk, and get some change! I'll promise to be

good, and not disarrange the bandages. Dash it, I couldn't if I tried!"

Beryl's heart beat thickly. Every tone of the voice was Clive's. She glanced at the candle, but she dared not—dared not—take it to the bed and look at him.

"I have had some rest," she said.

"But not enough," he retorted. "You want a week off. I tell you I'm all right. If I'm going to get well, I'm going to get well; if I'm going to die, what's the sense of you wearing yourself out for me? Besides, there are ever so many other fellows, aren't there? Why don't you go and nurse them? Though, God knows, I don't want to lose you!"

"I'm going to stay with you for a time," said Beryl.

Clive sighed. "Oh, very well! You'll do as you like, I know. There's nothing more obstinate than a nurse, not even a transport mule. Any news of the general?"

"No," said Beryl; "he left with the main body three days ago."

"That Italian fellow is all right?" asked Clive.

"The man whose life you saved?" said Beryl. She had heard the story of the trooper Burton's heroic rescue of the Italian volunteer, though she had seen neither rescuer nor rescued. "Yes; he has gone with the troop."

"That's all right," declared Clive, with a sigh of satisfaction. "He was a fine fellow, and fought like an Englishman. That sounds like an impertinence, doesn't it? We Englishmen think that no one can fight like ourselves; that's where we make the mistake." He tried to conceal a groan with a cough, and followed it by attempting to whistle "Wrap me in my old Stable Jacket."

"You are in pain," said Beryl. "Can I do anything?"

"Not a bit," replied Clive, cheerfully, too cheerfully.

Beryl rose unsteadily, and, with feet that seemed shod with lead, went for the bowl of soaking lint.

She approached the bed. "Tell me which of your wounds—" she began. Then she went and fetched the candle and held it above her head. The mockery of a light fell on the wounded man's face. She nearly dropped the candle; then she remembered what she was and her duty. Her whole frame stiffened firmly; but as she looked down at the white, drawn face, a mist floated before her eyes. For, if she were not dreaming, Clive Marle lay stretched out before her! It seemed to her impossible, grotesquely so; but as he opened his eyes, which the pain had closed, and looked up at her, the truth struck her like a physical blow. She shrank back from the

bed, and some of the water spilled from the bowl. Even in that moment the woman's instinct of concealment rose within her, and she put the candle behind her so that while its light fell upon his face her own was in dark shadow.

He pointed to his breast reluctantly. She drew down the bed-clothes and opened his night-shirt. The broad chest was bandaged thickly. With trembling fingers—with fingers that trembled with a thrill of love and that maternal tenderness which throbs in the heart of every woman for the man she loves—she removed the present bandages and applied the cool lint to the terrible wound. She did it skilfully, with gentle firmness, though the mist, which sprang from tears now, rolled before her eyes.

He had sinned against her, had sought her ruin, had deceived her as basely as ever a man could do. But he was the man she had loved, the man she still loved, and he was lying helpless under her hand. All her heart went out towards him, though she strove to hold it back. As she adjusted the cool and soothing bandage, she told herself that this man was unworthy of her love. But, for all her telling, the love welled up in her heart, poured from her eyes, thrilled to the very tips of the fingers which touched him gently and even caressingly.

Olive looked up at her with pain-dimmed eyes.

"You're awfully good to a chap, Sister Ursula!" he said. "I've never been much on religion, and I've always laughed at the idea of angels; but I can't laugh much now. You see, I've had one beside me for the last—how long is it? And I'm afraid that all your trouble is going to be wasted; I'm afraid I'm going to kick the bucket after all. That's rather hard on you, sister; it's playing it low down, after all the trouble you've taken. But I can't help it; I'd live if I could, though life seems a poor kind of game when you've seen as much of it as I have."

"You may get better," said Beryl, in a voice still quite unlike her own.

"Perhaps; but I don't think I shall; and so, sister, I'm going to give you more trouble. That's the way we men pay a woman who does anything for us. Do you think you shall ever go to England?"

Beryl moistened her lips. "I may; it is not unlikely," she answered; and her voice sounded so strangely in her own ears that she did not wonder that he did not recognise it.

"If you do," he said, "be sure you go down to Devonshire."

Beryl's hand closed on the blanket.

"Devonshire?" she breathed.

"Yes," he said. "Best county of the lot. Don't you miss it. You go there, and you'll thank me for the tip. And, when you go there, go to a place called Trentishoe. It's worth a visit. There's a house there, a little cottage on a hill, called Hill Cote. If you've got time, I want you to go and see some people there called 'Frayne.' They are friends of mine. She's a girl—"

A spasm of pain set him quivering from head to foot. Beryl's grip of the blanket grew tighter.

"I want to tell her—" He stopped. "My God! What can you tell her?" he asked himself, as if in despair. Then his voice, broken and hoarse, went on again: "Tell her I'm not the scoundrel she thought me—that I never loved any woman but her. She won't believe you—on your simple word, I mean—for because I deceived her about my name and—and my character, she threw me over. But just show her this!"

He drew a long breath, and one wasted hand plucked feverishly at a bandage.

"My coat's hanging up there behind the door. Do you mind getting it?"

Beryl went and unhooked the coat. He tried to raise himself in bed and feel for the pocket, but sank back exhausted by the effort. "There's a pocket-book there!" he said.

"Take it out, will you?"

Beryl took out the pocket-book and held it out to him. He made a feeble effort to open it, failed, and signed to her.

"There's a paper in there," he said. "Just give it to her, and tell her—tell her anything you like!"

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CHAPTER XXXIX.

THE paper was enclosed in a stained and much-creased envelope—with an address; it was too dark for her to see what it was. She thrust it in the bosom of her robe. She would have gone then, that very moment; but she could not leave her post; it was her duty to remain until Sister Ursula returned to relieve her. She looked down at the drawn face with infinite pity, and with infinite love, though she tried to crush down the latter emotion.

In all probability, he was dying, and her pity was not mis-

placed; she could forgive him with a clear conscience; but had he not forfeited all right to her love?

Olive spoke again after a minute or two, which seemed hours to Beryl.

"I take it you've accepted the charge of the paper, sister; that you'll do as I ask you? I don't want you to go to England, to Devonshire, on purpose; but, if you should go to England, I'll ask you to promise me to go to that place in Devonshire, and find out Miss Frayne."

"I promise," said Beryl, almost inaudibly.

"Thanks!" he faltered in reply. "That's the worst of being good and self-sacrificing, a man takes advantage of it. If you'd been an ordinary nurse, I shouldn't have dreamt of asking you; but that black dress of yours, the cross you carry, makes one feel that you are a kind of nun or priest; and, at such times as these, when a man lies on his back and spends hour after hour staring into the face of Death—I've seen him sitting there, over there in the corner, with his bony chin in his hand, his elbows on his knees, as if he were waiting for me, waiting patiently, but surely. I don't think I'm afraid. I never had much fear of death, and lately life hasn't been much of a game; it never is when you're on the losing side; and I sha'n't be very sorry to chuck it up!"

"You are young yet," said Beryl, and she tried to keep her voice steady.

Olive smiled grimly. "I'm not much of a patriarch," he answered, "but I've about drained the cup, and I can assure you, sister, that it's not very sweet even when it's at its clearest. But that's not true!" he added, suddenly. "God knows, I found it sweet enough for a time! It was only a short time, it's true, but it was Paradise while it lasted. I know I'm boring you, sister; but I've got the impulse on me to talk, and—you look so weird and ghostly, so like a priest, as you stand there, that I feel like wanting to confess."

"I am not a priest," she said. "You must not confess to me."

"Why not?" he responded. "By the way, sister, your voice sounds as if you had a cold. I'm not surprised if you have; you've been about at all hours of the night, in all weathers; you must be tired out. I'm like that French king—an unconscionable time dying. I'm very sorry. If I were out of the way you could go and nurse the other poor devils. The other sister must find her hands full. What is she like; as good and gentle as you, Sister Ursula?"

Beryl remained silent. He, too, was silent for a minute or

so; then, as the pain seized him again, he tried to whistle, to stifle the groan that rose to his lips. When the pain had abated, he went on:

"If I were going to confess, I wonder where I should begin. A man's life is such a mixture of folly and sin, and it's difficult to tell where the folly ends and the sin begins. And I come of a bad lot—I don't urge that as an excuse—but there it is; and what's bred in the bone comes out in the flesh, I suppose. I lost my mother when I was a youngster—when a boy loses his mother, he loses his anchor, and he drifts; in nine cases out of ten, he drifts to the devil. I did. I drifted in pleasant company. My nearest relative, Lord Doyne—" he stopped for a moment, and bit his lip.

"I've let out more than I intended," he said, "but I may as well make a clean breast of it. My uncle is the Marquis of Doyne. I am Lord Clive Marle. Your lips will be sealed, I know, and you won't split on me?"

Beryl winced. "Do not say any more!" she faltered. "I am not a priest. It is not right—"

"Oh, let me talk!" he said. "I've been silent so long; I've bottled it up for so many months. I've a kind of feeling that I shall go off the hooks more comfortably if I open my heart to some one; and to whom should I open it but to the woman who has nursed me so devotedly—like a sister, a mother?"

Beryl tried to tell him that she had not nursed him, that it was Sister Ursula, but the words failed her, and Clive went on:

"I led the life most men in my position lead; that is to say, I lived for the moment, and the pleasure the moment afforded. I was about as useless an animal as you'd find in zoölogy. I lived so fast that I had to call in a doctor. He was a friend of my mother's; he was fond of her before she married. He dealt with me like an honest man, and he told me to cut London and go into the country; he went so far as to indicate the place. He sent me to Trentishoe, in Devonshire. It's a God-forsaken place, but it's lovely beyond description—and so I won't try to describe it."

Beryl sank into the chair beside the bed. Her heart was beating fast and painfully. What was he going to say?

"The first night I arrived there I resolved to get out of it as soon as possible. But I didn't; because I met a girl there. It's always a girl, you know."

Beryl's hand went to her lips to check the sigh which rose from her heart.

"She was the loveliest, the sweetest—but I don't want to

bore you more than I can help, sister," he broke off. "Let it suffice that she became the one woman in the world for me, and that I loved her—well, you may guess how much I loved her when I tell you that no other woman—and I have met many pretty women since and before—has ever been able to stir my heart an inch. She was as innocent and as pure as one of the wayside flowers which smiled upon her as she passed. I was a coward—a cur, if you like—and I concealed my rank and my past. I won her love on false pretences. I pretended to be poor, everything that I was not. How does that strike you, sister?"

Beryl made no reply.

"This cut on my arm is burning like mad," he said; "if it isn't troubling you too much—"

She rose and unwound the bandage, and replaced it with a cool and fresh one. She adjusted it with a gentleness gained by experience, with a tenderness springing from her great love. He looked up at her gratefully and sighed his thanks, and she resumed her seat beside the bed.

"I hid my rank, and, worse than all, my evil reputation. I let her think me all that was good and honest. She knew nothing of the world; if she had, if she had known that the man who wooed her was—well, what I was—she had strength of mind and character to send me away, to cast me from her. And she would have been quite right. I was no more worthy of her than I am of a star in heaven. But I loved her, and I know that she loved me. The devil helps his own, they say, and he helped me. I had to go to London. By a strange fluke she came to London also; I met her there. I arranged a clandestine marriage. You must know that I was, so to speak, in the hands of my uncle, the marquis. He made me an allowance; I depended upon it, because I was up to my ears in debt. I wanted her to marry me secretly."

Beryl rose unsteadily and went to the chest of drawers. There was a glass of water upon it, and she moistened her lips. Then she returned to her seat in the shadow, and Clive went on.

"I had hard work to persuade her to consent to a secret marriage, but, eventually, I succeeded. I made all the arrangements. I planned everything like a hero in a melodrama, and then, like the heroine, she failed me. By some means—God knows how!—she discovered who I was; was told—God knows by whom!—my past history, and, at the last hour, the last moment, she drew back, and threw me over."

Beryl leant back, white and trembling.

"She was quite right, of course," said Clive. "No pure, white-minded girl would consent to marry a man of my reputation. She drew back in time; she went back to her father, and, I've no doubt, thanks her stars for her escape."

Beryl's eyes were closed, and her hands were clinched tightly.

"She was quite right," repeated Clive. "Mind, I don't blame her in the least. I was not worthy of her. I was not good enough for her. Most men—most men of my set, at any rate—would have laughed, and got over the business; but I could not. You see, I loved her. I don't suppose, sister, you quite realise what this meant to me. You don't know what love means. How should you? To you, life is one unending sacrifice; you thrust away all earthly feeling. But to me it meant—well, death in life. I tell you"—he raised himself on his elbow, and stared at her feverishly through the darkness—"it meant—madness. I tell you that I had never loved any woman as I loved her. She was the breath of my life, the heart of my heart, and soul of my soul. When I had lost her I lost all that makes life worth living. If I had married her, I should, under Providence—that's a good phrase, sister!—have been a good man. But having lost her, I was just a waif blown by the wind. I was tempted to go back to the old ways; but my love for her, her love for me, perhaps, fought against it. I hated the old world of sin and folly; I loathed the impure past which had divided us. I thought I would begin a new life, and I came out here to have it. I was selfish still, for my hope was that in a life of action and danger I might forget her. I've had enough action, and I've had enough danger; but I can't forget her. She is the one woman in the world for me, and now, when I am dying, my thoughts tend towards her. I see her walking beside me across the moor, by the bubbling stream, and I long for her as I longed for her when she was really by my side. There's my story, Sister Ursula; not an uncommon one, I think; but there it is, and I want you to tell her, this Beryl Frayne, when you see her, when you go to England and to Devonshire, tell her that, lying here, mortally wounded, I thought of her as the one woman I loved with all my heart and soul."

Beryl rose, trembling in every limb.

"This is your confession?" she said. "Have you no more to say? Regard me as a priest, as one who can ease your tortured conscience. Have you no other sin to confess—no other sin against my sisters—against a woman?"

Olive looked at her with a faint surprise on his pale, distorted face.

"No," he said, "I can think of no other."

Beryl moistened her dry lips. "Is there no other woman you have wronged?" she asked.

Olive frowned, and bit his lips.

"I don't know what you mean," he said. "There is no other woman. I may have been foolish, but—there is no other woman."

Beryl bent over him. "Think!" she said in a voice broken by anguish. "Have you wronged no one but this girl—what is it you call her?—Beryl Frayne?"

"No one," said Olive. "My sin is against her, and against her alone. Why do you ask me?"

Beryl was silent for a moment. "Think again," she persisted. "You have called it your confession. If I were a priest, and could give you absolution, you would tell me all?"

"Yes; I would tell you all," he said, faintly, for the pain was coming on again, and rendered speech difficult. "I know—of nothing—else."

Beryl bent over him, her tears falling fast, for she wept not only for him, but for the illusions of her lost and ruined love.

"Think! Remember! Have you not ruined another life than hers?"

Olive lifted his brows. "No," he said. "The only wrong I did was to that pure-minded girl, in that God-forsaken place, Trentishoe. If I had anything else on my conscience, I'd tell you. It's likely I'm a dying man, Sister Ursula, and I know that this is no time for reserve or concealment. Here's my story, and you've got the whole of it."

Beryl stood over him. She saw the sweat of pain and exhaustion standing on his brow.

"Try to remember," she repeated once more. "You may be dying; you may be going to face your Maker. Was there no other woman whom you wronged as you tried to wrong this—this girl, Beryl Frayne?"

He looked up at her intensely, his brows knit, his lips tense.

"By Heaven! No!" he said.

There was a silence. Before Beryl's eyes rose the scene in the room in the house at St. James's; she saw the shabby figure of the girl who had come to beg help from the man who had deserted her; she saw the pale face with its hollows and lines; heard the sorrowful voice. Had she dreamt it all? No; for there was the portrait in the locket, the portrait which she had recognised as that of the wretched girl who laid

her ruin at Clive Marle's door. How could she doubt the evidence of her own senses? What motive could the girl have had in coming to the room, in telling her story to Beryl, but the desire to obtain assistance from Clive, to obtain it through her, Beryl?

And yet Clive, trembling on the brink of the grave, assured her that he had wronged no other woman! She felt bewildered. She longed to believe him; it was almost impossible to doubt him; and yet memory rose between her and belief, and would not let her accept his assertion.

"Don't you believe me?" he asked, breaking the silence with something like weary impatience in his voice. "Perhaps you and I are pulling in opposite directions, sister, and may mean totally different things. You, in your ignorance of the world, and the things that are done in it, may call the follies which men in my position are too apt to commit by a more serious name than the rest of the world would give them. How should you, who have spent your life shut up in a hospital or a Sisters' Home, know anything of degrees in sin? To you the faults a man piles up day by day and thinks nothing of, would seem as black as Erebus. If I were to make a full confession of them, I should have to tax my memory, and I should surprise you. I'll try, if you like. Sit down. I can't see your eyes, but they seem to rest on me like those of an accusing angel!"

Beryl sank into the chair, and drew behind the rough curtains which had been nailed up to shut off the draught. She hid her face in her hands, and almost held her breath as she listened.

"That's better," he said. "I feel ashamed enough, but I should feel more if your eyes were resting on me. I've led a useless life. I've been a spendthrift, have run through a pile of money; my mother left me a good estate, and there's only one man—Fleming, my agent—who could tell what's gone with it. I drank a little, and gambled a great deal; I was in a gaming and drinking set. I spent half my day in bed, and most of the night at the green table or behind the scenes of some music-hall or theatre. You don't find the best company there, and I daresay I was as bad as the rest. It was pleasant while it lasted; but not always pleasant, though, for I remember feeling awfully bored and sick of it at times. Then I kept horses, and did a bit of racing; but I ran my horses straight, and I meant them to win all the time, whether I'd backed them or not—this must be Greek to you, sister; do you understand?"

Beryl made a gesture of assent.

"In short," he went on, "I've been a useless fool in a set of fools; but, on my soul, I don't remember doing anything dishonourable—what we men call dishonourable—until I concealed my rank and position from Beryl—that's the girl I told you of. Don't you believe me?" he asked, with an earnestness and a touch of dignity which went straight to Beryl's heart. "Why don't you speak?"

How could she speak, with the remembrance of that pallid girl, of her broken-hearted story?

He sighed. "You're hard to satisfy, sister," he said. "Wait. You asked me about other women? Well, look here; I've been a fool and a spendthrift; I've wasted my substance on—; but no woman can stand beside my grave and say, 'There lies the man who wrought my ruin.'"

His voice was low, but almost solemn in its earnestness.

Beryl rose, trembling in every limb. She was almost convinced against the evidence of her senses. She stretched out her hand, and laid it on his burning forehead. She could not speak, but the touch of her hand in some way conveyed pity and—forgiveness.

Clive drew a long breath. "Thanks!" he said. "That's eased my mind. If I'm going to die, I feel somehow that I shall die in peace. When you see Beryl Frayne, you will tell her all that has passed between us. Tell her that as I was lying here I thought of her as I've thought of her ever since I lost her; as one who was far too good for me, as one whom I had no right to love, or try to make my own. She did right to throw me over—though, God knows, if she had stuck to me, I would have lived a very different life, and tried to redeem the past. But that's all over, and it's a poor business crying over might-have-beens."

The tears were blinding Beryl, and the wan face beneath her faded from her sight.

"While I've been lying here I've been trying to think if there was anything I can leave her. I know her father was poor, and I should have liked to have left her something—all I'd got, in fact. But I haven't anything to leave. And I don't suppose she would have accepted a penny from me. A good man might send her his blessing, but I'm quite sure my blessing wouldn't benefit anybody. So I can only send her my love; and I do that. Tell her—ah, well, what's the use!"

"Give me your message," said Beryl. "I will take it to her." Her aching heart was thirsting for it!

"Tell her I loved her as well as a better man could do; that I ask her to forgive me. Do you think she will?"

"She has forgiven you long ago," answered Beryl, almost inaudibly.

Clive looked up at her. "You said that very sweetly, sister," he said, "and I believe you're right. You said it as if you knew her; and I don't think she'll go back on you. It's very dark; I feel as if I could sleep; I feel easier for having told you. There's something in confession, after all. Now you go out and get some fresh air. But put some water near me, for I get fearfully thirsty."

Beryl drew a packing-case to the bedside, and placed a glass of water on it, then drew back behind the curtain. Presently she knew by his regular breathing that he had fallen asleep. She rose and bent over him. One arm, fearfully thin and closely bandaged, was stretched across the pillow; her hand stole towards it, and touched it caressingly; she bent lower, and her lips rested on his.

He stirred, and a faint smile passed across his face.

"Beryl!" he murmured.

She had scarcely time to draw back before the door opened, and Sister Ursula entered.

"Well—" she began; but Beryl held up her hand warningly. Sister Ursula went to the bed.

"Asleep!" she whispered, with surprise and satisfaction, "and sound asleep! This is the first time— What have you given him, done to him?"

"Nothing," said Beryl.

"There would be hope for him if he could sleep," observed Sister Ursula.

"Hope?" echoed Beryl, her heart beating fast.

Sister Ursula nodded. "Yes; he is so strong. I've seen worse cases than this. The trouble has been that he hasn't cared about getting well. I never knew a man so indifferent; and when a man's indifferent it's hard work to pull him through. How pale and tired you look! You'd better go into the air before you go back to the ward. That poor fellow is dead, I'm sorry to say; but all the rest are doing well."

Beryl lingered. "You think he may recover?" she asked, tremulously.

"It is just possible," replied Sister Ursula. "I hope he may. As I have said, the man has got on my nerves. I don't suppose you quite understand what I mean; you've only seen him for a short time, and don't know the effect he has upon you."

Beryl's lips moved, and her head drooped.

"Go now," said Sister Ursula in a voice of gentle command.

Beryl obeyed her superior, and turned to leave the room; but, as she reached the door, she looked back longingly at the sleeping man.

She went out into the courtyard; a young moon was rising above the belt of trees; there was infinite peace in the beautiful scene, but a storm was raging in her heart. She wanted to believe Clive's assertion, she felt that she *must* believe him, and yet—and yet! Before her rose the scene in St. James's, Patsy Pryde's worn face; she heard her broken-hearted voice. Beryl felt as if she were walking on the edge of a cliff on some dark night, helpless and confused, and unable to discern the path. She paced to and fro, her heart rent with love and doubt. But even if it were true, if she had wronged him, what hope was there for her? Even if he were innocent, the story of her mother's past rose as a barrier between them. Her head ached with the intensity of the strain. The fact of Clive's nearness, the fact that he loved her still, had loved her all through, filled her one moment with a joy beyond words; the next she was plunged into misery by the reflection that they were divided forever.

She went back to the ward, and set about her work. She tried to forget herself, to forget Clive; but her love for him revealed itself in the added tenderness of her tone, the gentleness of her touch as she ministered to and comforted the sick and wounded men. To them she seemed that night more like an angel than ever.

The night passed; a little after dawn she heard a horseman ride into the courtyard. She did not pay much attention, for messengers from the head-quarters of the troops arrived frequently; but a little later, Sister Ursula came into the ward with a despatch in her hand.

"We leave here at once," she said. "There has been a battle on the hills about twenty miles away, and the general has sent for us. Some other nurses are coming out from Pietermaritzburg to take our place. They should arrive presently, and directly they come we must go."

"And leave—him—I mean, these!" faltered Beryl.

Sister Ursula shrugged her shoulders. "Why, yes; we must obey orders, of course. But I'm sorry. I should like to have seen my patient through, either one way or the other. You'll be ready when I come for you?"

Beryl made a motion of assent, and Sister Ursula glided

quickly from the ward. No pen can describe the longing which possessed Beryl to see Clive again; but she had learnt one thing during her novitiate as a nurse—implicit obedience. So she stifled the longing, and remained at her post until Sister Ursula came for her.

"We start now," she said, briskly.

"How—how is—your patient?" asked Beryl.

"Better—that is, I think. He woke this morning, after a long sleep, and he seemed more at ease in body and mind, especially the latter."

Beryl drew a long breath; and a prayer for his recovery rose mutely from her aching heart.

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CHAPTER XL

THE bullock-waggon, with its shouting attendants, drew up in the courtyard. Beryl said "good-bye" to the men. Some of them pressed her hand, and tried to express their gratitude; but the majority could only gaze up at her in silence. One man tried to say, "God bless you, sister!" but broke down at the second word, and turned his face away helplessly.

As she got into the waggon Beryl gazed at the window of the room in which Clive lay, and her lips moved and her hands shook as they clasped each other tightly in her lap.

"You look awfully ill!" remarked Sister Ursula.

Beryl forced a smile. "I am quite well," she said; then her head dropped in her hands, and she cried quietly. Sister Ursula looked before her moodily.

"It's wonderful how fond one gets of the people one nurses," she said in a low voice.

"Yes!" faltered poor Beryl.

With guttural cries and much smacking of whips, the waggon was started, and left the settlement; but while the thin streak of smoke was discernible against the bright blue of the sky, Beryl's eyes were fixed upon it. She was going she knew not whither; but she was leaving her heart behind in the room in which Clive lay battling with death.

After some days of weary travelling, they reached the scene of another battle, and the sisters' work began again. Beryl did her share of it, and more than her share of it, as devotedly as heretofore; but a subtle change had come over her; she was restless and preoccupied; she could not sleep at night, when she was free to sleep. Though she was as tender and

patient with the wounded men under her charge as ever a woman could be, she was sometimes impatient and fretful when off duty.

The key to her present state of mind was very obvious; she was haunted by a doubt of Olive's guilt. And yet how could she doubt? she asked herself. Had she not seen the girl whom Olive had ruined, had she not heard her story from her own lips? Then, again, she longed for news of Olive. It was all very well to tell herself that she ought not to care whether he was alive or dead, but she did care, very much; her heart was eaten up by anxiety as to his fate.

No news reached her; there was no communication with Narriqua; the tide of battle was flowing farther and farther from the spot where she had left the man she loved lying 'twixt life and death; but his face was always before her; every time one of her wounded men spoke she heard Olive's weak and broken voice behind his.

Of course, Sister Ursula noticed the change in her companion, and one day she said to her:

"You will have to go back to Italy, or somewhere, sister. You have overworked yourself."

"No, I have not!" said Beryl, almost curtly. Her face was flushed, and her hands moved restlessly.

Sister Ursula said nothing, and went out. She had had a great deal of experience, had seen similar cases, and knew the signs when she met them.

About a week afterwards, a messenger brought a letter to Sister Ursula. It was from headquarters, requesting that one of the sisters should accompany a batch of men who had recovered sufficiently to be sent to England. All her life she had wanted to go to England—to see the Tower of London. Why the Tower of London should spring up in the mind of every foreigner as the most interesting place in London it would be difficult to explain. Most Londoners have never set eyes on it, and, it is to be feared, have no wish to do so. Sister Ursula sat with the letter in her lap, looking straight before her for a few minutes, during which she had decided upon an act of self-denial; to deny one's self a pleasure or a gratification for the sake of another, especially another sister, comes more or less easy to one of her order. With the letter in her pocket, she went straight to Beryl. She found her leaning against a tree, looking at nothing very hard.

"I have news for you, Sister Marie," said she. "You leave here to-morrow for the coast. You are to go with some of the wounded men to England."

Beryl started, and the blood rushed to her face, then left it pale again. "I don't want to go," she said. "Why do *you* not go? You wanted to see England; here is an opportunity."

"We do not always do what we want, or go where we want," replied Sister Ursula, quietly. "You are appointed to this task."

Beryl remembered her vow of obedience, and made a gesture of assent. Sister Ursula laid her hand upon Beryl's arm.

"Marie, Providence knows what we want better than we do. Get your things ready."

The parting between the two was characteristic of both. Sister Ursula was pale, but perfectly calm and self-restrained. Beryl tried to imitate her composure, but she failed ignominiously; her colour came and went, the tears rose to her eyes, and presently overflowed, and her arm stole round the elder woman's neck, and her face was hid upon her bosom.

"It is hard to leave you," she said, with a quick sob. "All my life it has been nothing but parting with those I loved!"

Sister Ursula's thin lips twitched; she had grown very fond of the young girl. It was wonderful how many persons grew fond of Beryl Frayne.

"We are all drifting to the land where there are no partings, my dear!" she said. She had learnt the "my dear" from Beryl herself; but it was the first time she had used it; and there were tears in her own eyes as she disengaged Beryl's clinging arm.

The voyage home restored the colour to Beryl's face, if it did not bring back the peace to her heart. She had plenty of work to do, for the journey tried the sick men—her patients. Notwithstanding her nun-like garb, she was treated like a very important person on board the liner. One night, when they were half-way across, she was induced to sing in the saloon—the captain had heard her singing to her men—and her voice, in conjunction with her beautiful face, and sweet, subdued manner, won the hearts of all; the men were quite ready to fall in love with her; the women—there were a number of ladies on board—wanted to pet her; and all thought that it was very hard she should have to nurse the sick troopers, and they would have wooed her to the saloon; but Beryl remained true to her trust, and returned to her patients.

They were more than grateful to her, and when the vessel reached England they gathered round her in a vain endeavour to express their love and gratitude.

One of the Nursing Sisters from the London branch was

waiting to receive her, and carried her off to the Home. They made a great deal of her, and for a week or two they would not permit her to do any work. Beryl took a walk occasionally, and found it difficult to realise that she was indeed in England, in London; for the Home was in a crowded part of the great city, and far away from St. James's, and the only part of London she knew. She walked about the streets, and thought of Clive and her past life, and wondered whether he was dead or alive.

One morning, the Sister Superior came into the common living-room.

"Does any one know Italian?" she asked.

There was a silence, but several of the sisters looked hard at Beryl. She rose, and said:

"I do."

"You will go to the Grand Hotel at Charing Cross," said the Superior. "There's an Italian lady lying ill there. Go at once, please."

Beryl packed her small bag, and, arriving at the Grand, handed her letter to the clerk.

"No. 249," he said.

Beryl went up the lift. A maid opened the door of the suite of rooms. "Oh, you're the nurse!" she said. "This way, please!"

She led Beryl to the bedroom, and the latter approached the bed, and looked down at the patient. Then she started back with surprise and consternation. She had been sent to nurse the Princess Carasca.

"The lady has been very ill," said the maid, "but she's better now. The doctor's left her, but he'll be back again this afternoon. If you ring the electric bell, I'll come directly."

Beryl sat down beside the bed, her heart beating fast. The princess was asleep, and she slept for over an hour after Beryl's entrance; as she stirred, Beryl rose and stood before her. The princess looked up, started, and uttered an exclamation.

"Beryl! It is you!"

"Yes," said Beryl, with difficulty. "I am so glad. Are you very ill? Oh, it does not seem real!"

The little princess smiled. "It is the hand of Providence," she said. "I have always felt that I had not lost you forever. When I received that note which you wrote me, saying you had joined the Nursing Sisters, I felt that we should meet again. I went to the Home, but you had gone; gone where I could not follow. You are pale and thin, my child,

but just the same dear girl we all loved. You shall tell me the story of your wanderings presently; I am dying to hear it. Ah, Beryl, have you acted wisely?"

Beryl bent over her. "I—I think so, dear princess," she said. "You do not know all! But I do not think you ought to talk."

"Perhaps not," responded the princess, shrewdly, "but it won't do me any harm to listen. I've been very ill, but I'm a great deal better, and I shall soon be quite well, now that you've come to nurse me. You shall tell me what has happened since we parted."

Beryl gave her an account of the life and the work in Africa, and the princess held Beryl's hand during the relation.

"My poor child!" she said, slowly shaking her head. "You have behaved like an angel, a saint, and it has all been very well; but it is past now."

"Past, princess!" echoed Beryl, with surprise.

Pauline nodded shrewdly. "Yes; you have behaved just like an impulsive, warm-hearted girl would do. But you were wrong."

"Wrong!"

Beryl spoke the word strongly, but already she began to have misgivings.

"Yes, dear," said the princess. "I do not know the whole reason for your flight, but, from the few words which my poor brother spoke before he died, and from things which I have learnt since, I can understand why he should have given you Pelagio. He did it by way of atonement, reparation. Beryl, had you any right to refuse that atonement, that reparation? You, a woman, a girl, set yourself above the Highest. There is mercy in Heaven; you refused to grant it. Was that right, just, merciful? Carasca may have sinned against you and yours; he tried, poor fellow, to repair the injury, the wrong he wrought. Were you right in robbing him of the consolation which his penitence merited?"

Beryl had never looked at the problem from this point of view. It staggered her. She gazed at the princess with doubt, irresolution in her beautiful eyes.

"Don't you see, dear?" asked Pauline, very gently, very tenderly. "Do not you think that the person he had wronged—we will speak no names—would have accepted his attempt at reparation? Do you think she would have been as hard, as merciless, as you are?"

Beryl sank into the chair beside the bed, then suddenly she fell on her knees and hid her face on the coverlet. The prin-

cess laid her hand upon the band of linen which framed Beryl's face.

"You see, my dear," she said, in Italian, "you were wrong. You should have taken what he gave. She he wronged would have done so, would she not?"

Beryl rose, her hand outstretched. "I have been wrong," she said. "I will do whatever you wish!"

The Princess Carasca smiled.

"Go, then, and take off that hideous dress," she said. "You will find some of your dresses in one of my trunks. Take what Carasca and Providence, guiding him, have given you. I have waited for this day, for something told me that you would come to me, or I should find you. Don't let me wait any longer. I want to see the Beryl I knew and loved, not a mere nurse in a black robe. Go, my child!"

Beryl found some of her clothes amongst the princess's belongings, and put them on. Pauline greeted her return with a smile of loving approbation and gratitude.

"That is better," she said. "Now you will go down to the hall, and write 'The Princess Pelagio' under my name; and when I am quite recovered—and I shall recover very soon now—we will go into the world together. You will write to the Lady Superior, and tell her you have resigned. Write now, *cara mia*."

Beryl, feeling strangely in one of her old dresses, sat down and wrote her resignation.

The princess did not rest with this. When she got better—and she recovered quickly under Beryl's skilful nursing—she displayed a singular desire for amusement, and went out into the world, insisting upon Beryl's accompanying her.

Princesses are none too common, even in London; and paragraphs began to show their heads in the society journals announcing the fact that the Princess Carasca, with her niece, the Princess Pelagio—they invented the relationship—were staying at the Grand Hotel, and had appeared at Lady So-and-so's ball, or the Marchioness of So-and-so's reception.

Beryl did not refuse to accompany the Princess Carasca on her round of gaiety; but she found very little delight or satisfaction in it. She could not forget Olive's wan face, and his broken voice too often penetrated the music at dance or concert.

They had visited many theatres, and their appearance had aroused not a little interest and curiosity among the audience; for Beryl's face had attracted the attention of London society—the season was in full swing at the time—and the society

journals had hinted at some romantic history attaching to her name. One night the princess said that she had engaged a box at the Frivolity.

Everybody knows the kind of entertainment which the Frivolity offers to its patrons. It is a mixture of burlesque and variety business, which appears to hit the taste of the times. You get some fairly good singing, some fairly good acting, but you are always sure of good dancing. It was at the Frivolity that the skirt dance, now a firmly-established institution, was introduced.

On the night of their visit, Beryl leant back in her chair, well behind the curtain, for their entrance had been noticed by the audience, and eyes and opera-glasses had been directed towards the box with that curious attention which Beryl always tried not to notice, but which she always resented. A programme was on her lap, but she did not even glance at it; and for some time—indeed, through the first act of the so-called burlesque—she scarcely looked at the stage, but turned the bracelet on which her eyes were fixed with an absent and preoccupied air. There were diamonds in the bracelet, diamonds in her hair, and round her neck. And it was by reason of these diamonds and certain fabulous stories that society credited her with immense wealth.

The play, if it can be so called, proceeded. In the middle of the second act a dancer made her appearance. That she was of an importance above the rest was proved by the stir of expectancy, and the applause of the audience. She came on with an assured smile, sang a song, and began to dance. Both efforts were received with rapture by the crowded theatre. Beryl looked on listlessly—she was far away in Africa. Suddenly, the box-door opened, and a certain Count Rudolph, attached to the Italian Embassy, and a friend of Princess Carasca, entered. Beryl returned his nod absently.

"A very full house," she heard him say to the Princess Carasca. "Nearly everybody is here." He indicated several persons of rank and celebrity.

"Who is that in the opposite box?" asked the princess.

He put up his opera-glasses. "Oh, that is the Marquis of Doyme," he said. "Wonderful man! He looks quite young, and yet he is—goodness knows how old! He is a frequent visitor here. He is a great admirer of Patsy Pryde. She is in great form to-night, isn't she?"

Beryl repressed a start. She looked at the programme—Patsy Pryde's name stood out prominently. Beryl leant forward with sudden and painful interest. Could it be possible?

Patsy Pryde appeared again in the next scene; she sang and danced again. The dance was of the wildest and most extravagant description, and the amount of physical exertion required to perform it must have been extraordinary. The gentleman behind Beryl was full of admiration and wonder.

"Splendid!" he exclaimed. "She has outdone herself. But I think she will do it once too often. A friend of mine"—he mentioned the name of a well-known physician—"has warned her. That kind of thing, when carried too far, means paralysis!"

She finished her dance as he spoke, and a roar of applause rose from the audience, which shouted for an encore.

Beryl waited for the reappearance of the actress with a sensation difficult to describe. As Patsy Pryde came bounding forward, with a smile of triumph on her painted lips, Beryl leant forward breathlessly, and tried to identify in the smooth and joyous face of the dancer the haggard and woe-begone countenance of the girl who had told her wretched story in Clive's room. But there seemed absolutely no resemblance.

As the dance ended, Beryl heard the gentleman behind her again say, "Splendid! But she will do it once too often."

The curtain dropped, and Princess Carasca rose, and drew her opera-cloak round her; but Beryl still sat, her eyes fixed on the stage. Her brain was in a whirl.

"Come, my child," said the princess; and Beryl rose.

Patsy Pryde! Were there two Patsy Prydes? What did it mean? She saw the Marquis of Doyne rise from his seat in the opposite box, saw the vast audience making its way from the theatre, saw it all as if in a dream.

Once more the gentleman from the embassy, as he adjusted her opera-cloak, murmured his prophecy:

"She'll do it once too often, mark my words!"

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CHAPTER XLI.

MANY other persons besides the gentleman from the Italian Embassy noticed the reckless way in which Patsy Pryde had danced that night; and it was remarked upon at most of the clubs, especially at the Outcasts', which was crowded as usual with the members who had dropped in after the theatre for a little supper, a smoke, and a chat before by-bye.

"Patsy was in tremendous form to-night," said Lord Wally to Sir Terence Brady as they leant back in the Outcasts' ex-

tremely comfortable chairs and discussed the programme at the Frivolity. "I never saw her dance half so well; she was like a whirlwind, a—what do you call it? Those things you have in the desert; you know, Terence."

"Sirocco?" suggested Sir Terence.

"That's the article," assented Wally. "She swept on the stage like a storm, and danced as if she were mad."

"It was very fine, no doubt," said Sir Terence, "but I don't know that I altogether enjoyed it. It was a bit too violent for me."

"I don't mind admitting that it struck me in the same way," said Lord Wally. "It looked to me as if she were reckless, desperate, and didn't care whether she flung a limb off or dropped down in a heap. Made me quite uncomfortable, I assure you."

"She usen't to dance like that," said Sir Terence, thoughtfully. "She always moved herself pretty smartly; but she didn't take your breath away, and make you wonder what the devil she was going to do next, as she did to-night; and I fancied she looked a little drawn about the gills. Overworked, I daresay."

"Why, she's been abroad in Italy somewhere; with that man, Paretti," remarked Wally.

"Yes," drawled Sir Terence; "she's quarrelled with him. He has disappeared, no one knows where."

At this moment Patsy Pryde herself entered—it happened to be a lady's night at the Outcasts'—and the two men, as they looked at her, exchanged significant glances; for Patsy Pryde had altered very much, and, despite the carefully artistic make-up, she looked years older. There was the drawn look about her mouth which Sir Terence had noticed; there were slight hollows in the child-like face which the grease, paint, and powder concealed when she was behind the footlights, but which revealed themselves at close sight. The old smile was there still, but it wavered and flickered even as she passed up the room amidst a volley of greetings and welcomes.

Very soon after her entrance the Marquis of Doyne came in. There was no change in him, and his smile, as famous in its way as Patsy's, did not waver. He bowed, and laughed, and talked as he made his way to a seat and called for a drink; but he did not seat himself near Patsy Pryde, or go very near her. Since she had won the diamond necklace, he had rather avoided Patsy Pryde; and she, on her part, had shown no keen desire for his society. No doubt the most noble marquis, though he had so long since got rid of so inconvenient a thing

as a conscience, felt that he had been playing it rather low down when he had conspired with her to cheat his own nephew.

He had tried to forget the unpleasant incident, had tried to forget Clive; but he found it rather difficult to do so; for of late Africa and our doings there had exercised the public mind pretty considerably; the papers were full of African news, and men at the club were continually talking about the place and our enterprise there, very much to the marquis's annoyance; for Clive had gone to Africa, was one of the "common troopers" the papers were writing about. To the marquis's amazement, it really looked as if these said "common troopers" were going to be made a fuss over; and once or twice he was almost convinced that, instead of disgracing himself, Clive would prove that it was possible for a man of rank and position to gain an enviable notoriety, to say nothing of honour, while playing at soldiering in a far-off and benighted land.

He took up a paper while he was waiting for his drink, and at once lighted upon the head-line, "More Fighting in Africa! Great Victory."

He dropped the paper as if it had bitten him, and looked round for some one to talk to.

Two men, who had been joined by Wally and Sir Terence, were talking hard, and, of course, about Africa.

"Wish to goodness I'd gone there!" said Wally. "Why, there's been more fighting there during the last six months than we've had anywhere else for the last five years!"

"And don't our chaps fight!" said Sir Terence. "They're only a mere handful, and yet they're able to knock the sawdust out of some of those impis two or three thousand strong."

"And most of those troopers are quite young fellows, chaps who have never seen any fighting before, and never been in the regular service," remarked a third man.

The fourth of the group looked up from a paper he was glancing at, and said:

"I never see any mention of Marle. I wonder what's become of him. Not knocked on the head, I hope?"

Lord Wally frowned significantly at him, and glanced warningly towards the back of the marquis's head. But the marquis rose, humming lightly, as if he had not heard, and sauntered away.

"That's Marle's uncle," said Wally.

"Sorry; but I don't know that I much care," said the

man. "I never took much stock in Doyne myself, and I've an idea that he didn't treat Marle very fairly. But it is strange that we don't hear of him, isn't it?"

Lord Wally sighed. "Hope nothing's happened to poor old Clive!" he said. "He was too good to be knocked on the head by a beastly savage. But don't you run away with the idea that the marquis doesn't care. I fancy he cares a great deal more than any of us suspect. He'd smile and sing if every relation, or he himself, for that matter, were going to the stake. He's a what-you-way-call-it."

"A stoic?" suggested Sir Terence, whose chief object in life appeared to be the supplying of missing words in Wally's vocabulary.

"Yes," said Wally, "he's a stoic; and I've heard somewhere they feel things all the more for trying to hide 'em."

"There was a man here last night," said Sir Terence, with his usual drawl, "who had just come from Africa. He's an Italian count, or something of that kind. I was introduced to him last night, but, of course, I didn't catch his name; and he was telling some of the fellows about the fighting over there. It seems that he was in the midst of it, and he's quite full, up to the brim, with admiration for the way those trooper chaps fought. He's over there now, just there by the door. He's coming this way. Hold on; I'll speak to him and try and draw him out. You fellows hold your tongues, and let him go slow; for though he speaks English like a Whitestable native, he drops into his own lingo when he gets excited, and then he's hard to follow. Good-evening," he said, as Count Hubert came up. "We were just talking about Africa."

Hubert's handsome face lit up in an instant as he made his graceful and ceremonious bow to the little group.

"Ah, yes, gentlemen!" he said, "it is no wonder! I have just come from there, and I have seen how your countrymen fight. It is the first time I have been with them in warfare, and having seen what I have seen, I am not surprised that you English always win!"

Lord Wally pushed a chair forward, and Sir Terence courteously asked the count to have a drink. Hubert looked round helplessly for a moment, for he found it difficult to meet in England with a liquor he could stand. The whisky-and-soda which his new acquaintances disposed of in such vast quantities went straight to his head, and made him excited and then sleepy. He said he would take a little beer-and-water, and

in a minute or two the young Italian was recounting his adventures in swift and fluent English intermingled with more rapid Italian.

"You English at home here do not know what is being done there," he said. "A handful of men are making an empire! And, *per Baccho*, what men! They do not care for their lives one little bit; they fight as if they were playing at a game and enjoyed it."

His auditors nodded comprehendingly.

"I could tell you stories of individual—what do you call it?—prowess, heroism, which would astonish you." The group didn't look as if it could be easily astonished. "I will only tell you of one. At the battle of Narriqua I was cut off from the main body; I was surrounded by the blacks; there was no chance for me, and I thought my end had come; I had not a shot left to fire; I was completely surrounded, and I saw death as plainly as I see this glass, gentlemen. And then, all at once, one of your troopers rode straight for me and cut his way through the howling devils and put himself at my side and fought with me shoulder to shoulder. He fought like a demon, an Englishman; I can say no more. He beat the foe back; he cut a way for me, and he would have had me fly without him. Enough! We rode away together; and I owe my life to that man. His name was Burton!" His voice shook for a moment, and for a moment his hand, as it lifted his glass of sugar-and-water, also shook. "He was only a trooper; in our army he would be a colonel, a general!"

"We've got so many fellows like that," said Wally under his breath; "can't make them all colonels and generals; should have no privates at all."

"What became of him?" asked Sir Terence.

Count Hubert looked straight before him. "It is my great grief that I do not know. He was badly wounded, mortally, I fear; he was left at Narriqua, in a sort of hospital there. I was ordered off. I have not seen him again, have not heard of him. But, gentlemen, I would give more than ten years of my life to meet him, to take him by the hand. His voice stopped abruptly, and he took up his glass and managed to hide his face behind it.

Unseen by the group, Doyne had sauntered up. "Will some one kindly make me known to Count Hubert?" he asked, with his pleasant smile and musical voice. Sir Terence made the introduction. It was a question, often debated afterwards, which was the more graceful bow, the Italian's or that of the marquis.

"You are a visitor, count?" said the marquis. "I trust you will find London not too disappointing. It must seem very dull and grimy, after your delightful Italy. But I forget—I have been, somewhat inexcusably, listening to your admirable description of your experiences in Africa. My personal interest can be, indeed, my only excuse. I have a nephew out there." His smile never faltered, his voice was soft, his manner as suave as usual; the group of Englishmen looked at him, though they knew him well, with unwilling admiration. They felt that he was indeed a wonderful man. "He went out, obeying the impulse of the moment—a mere whim—as a common trooper. I have heard no tidings of him, and I am naturally very anxious. Now, I wonder," with his most charming smile, "whether you happened to meet him? His name is Marle—Clive Marle."

Count Hubert repeated the name several times. With an Italian's courtesy, he was trying his hardest to remember.

"No," he said at last, "I do not recollect any name like that."

"I am sorry!" said Doyne. "I had hoped to hear some tidings of him; he is my nephew, and heir."

Some one came up at that moment and spoke to Count Hubert, and, with his usual ceremonious bow, he left the group. The marquis sank into the chair Hubert had vacated.

"Was that the young princess, whom I saw at the Frivolity to-night?" he asked. "I mean that very beautiful girl who sat in a side box with the lady who, I believe, is the Princess Carasca. A very beautiful young girl, wearing some really remarkable diamonds."

Lord Wally nodded. "That was Princess Pelagio," he said.

Doyne smiled and nodded once or twice approvingly. "The papers don't overpraise her," he remarked. "She looks both beautiful and charming; two very different things, by-the-way. Have you met her?"

"Not yet," said Wally. "She and her aunt, or guardian, or whatever she is, the Princess Carasca, have not gone out very much; but I believe they are going to appear at Lady Dorchester's to-morrow night!"

"Ah; then I shall have the pleasure of meeting her," said Doyne. He talked for a few minutes with one and the other, then he rose, said good-night sweetly, and disappeared. Lord Wally looked at Sir Terence and shrugged his shoulders. "Did you hear how he asked after poor old Clive? He did it very well, but I tell you he's fretting for him. I know that little twitch of Doyne's under-lip."

Sir Terence nodded. "That chap Burton must be a jolly good sort," he remarked, laconically.

"Yes; I wonder whether he died. I like that Italian, too; I reckon he fought as hard as the rest."

One of the group, who had sauntered off, came back with an evening paper in his hand.

"Look here," he said, "wasn't 'Burton' the name that Italian count was talking of? Well, here's his name in a list of men coming home on sick leave. It's in this last edition. He's Captain Burton now. Where's the count? He'd like to hear this."

But Count Hubert had gone.

"I'm glad he's alive," said Wally. "But I wish to goodness I could hear some news of poor old Clive. Poor old chap, I'm afraid he's gone over to the majority!"

The next night Lord Doyne went to the Dorchesters'. The party was a crowded one, and after the marquis had paid his respects to the hostess, he put up his *pince-nez* and looked about him as if in search of some one.

Lady Dorchester smiled. "You're looking for the young princess?" she said.

The marquis, with a charming affectation of surprise at her acuteness, admitted the fact.

"I have heard so much about her," he said, "that I am anxious to make her acquaintance."

"So is everybody," said Lady Dorchester, laughingly. "She is my great attraction to-night; and, as is the case with all great attractions, I have had some difficulty in securing her; for she is rather shy and retiring; scarcely shy, though, but she is very quiet, and doesn't like the fuss of admiration which nowadays we consider the proper tribute to lay at the feet of exceptional beauty, genius, or talent. She is sitting there beside her guardian, that little lady in black satin, the Princess Carasca. You'll be charmed with the Princess Pelagio; but I do hope you won't turn her head with any of your speeches culled from the garden of flattery. She is very young and very modest."

"It would be difficult, my dear lady, to flatter one so beautiful," said the marquis. She shook her fan at him chidingly, and he made his way across the room. He was some time doing it, for he had to stop and bow, and smile, and talk, as he went; but after a time he reached the settee where Beryl and the Princess Carasca were seated, and Lady Dorchester introduced him.

Beryl looked up with a slight start, the colour rose to her

face, and she looked at the smiling face with a gravity which had its due effect upon the marquis. He saw in a moment that flattery, however skilful, would be worse than thrown away upon the Princess Pelagio; and with a manner very much unlike his usual one, he began to talk to the Princess Carasca; and even when she made room for him between Beryl and herself he still continued to address himself to her. His voice effected Beryl strangely; it was so like Clive's, and yet so different; its sound was Clive's, but the tone was artificial; and there was nothing artificial about Clive. As she listened, she fell into a dreamy state, and was back at Trentishoe.

Presently Lord Doyne turned to her with a smile, but still with his unusual gravity.

"One always finds it so difficult, princess, to avoid the impertinence of asking one who, like yourself, is visiting our little England for the first time, how it impresses you?"

Beryl was about to say that she was no stranger in England; but she checked the impulse, and instead, said:

"Is not every one favourably impressed?"

The marquis listened to the sweet, well-bred voice, and instinctively nodded with approval as he thought that the voice was as beautiful as the girl's face.

"I don't know," he said. "I've sometimes an uncomfortable feeling that we don't impress our visitors as favourably as we should desire; and a still more uncomfortable suspicion that they must very often find us painfully insular, unconsciously vain-glorious, and sometimes exceedingly stupid. I know that when I go abroad I am not seldom shocked to discover that other nations have very often the advantage of us in manners, culture, and intelligence. An instance is ready to my hand. The lady who has just gone to the piano is an artiste of distinction; she is playing divinely; we should all be listening with rapt attention and respectful admiration; but, you see, we are none of us listening and are all of us talking. And I am the most hardened sinner of the lot," he added, with a touch of humour which almost made Beryl smile. "Then, again," he said, "Lady Dorchester has graciously asked us to come and see her this evening; but she has so many friends that the rooms are so crowded one can only see her for a moment, and one can only stay for a quarter of an hour because the crowd and the heat render any longer stay a physical impossibility. We shall keep her standing at the doorway until the dear lady is nearly exhausted, receiving the

savage, but are we any more advanced in such matters than he? I had the pleasure of seeing you at one of our theatres last night, princess."

"Yes," said Beryl. She remembered Patsy Pryde; she wondered whether the marquis knew anything about her, whether she could ask him.

"There, again," he said, in his soft and liquid voice, "we call what we saw a 'play,' but it is not in the least one. It is a medley of song and dance; all very charming in its way, but I have no doubt that in other countries, let us say your delightful Italy, no one would be absurd enough to call the entertainment by so exalted a name. But I am an old cynic, and I remember *autre temps, autre manieres*. But I hope you were amused."

"It was very amusing, I think," said Beryl. She was silent for a moment; then she said: "There was a girl there who danced very wonderfully. The name on the programme was Patsy Pryde."

The marquis nodded blandly and waited.

"She is a well-known actress, I suppose?" said Beryl; "I mean, she has been acting for some time?"

"Oh, yes," said the marquis; "for many years. She is one of London's favourites. You were struck by her?"

Beryl did not know what to say. How could she ask him whether there were two Patsy Prydes?

"Yes," she said. "I supposed she danced very well, that it was very clever."

"Oh, yes," he assented. "She is a remarkable little woman, and we have no one like her, in her line, on the English stage. She would be very proud if she knew that you admired her performance."

Something in his tone caused Beryl to say, "You know her?"

Lord Doyme smoothed the hair from one of his temples with his white hand. "I have that honour," he said. "I know so many people and such different sorts of people. She is a very worthy little woman."

"I want to see her again," said Beryl.

He was slightly surprised that she should be so impressed by Patsy Pryde.

"You must pay another visit to the Frivolity," he said. "That is, if you have time; you must have so much to see." Then he gracefully changed the subject, and began to talk of Italy. And presently Beryl found herself telling him of Pelagio, of Rome, of the placid lives led by the peasants by the

lake. Unconsciously she was forgetting that this man was Olive's uncle; and, that she should have done so, was a splendid testimony to the magnetic influence which the marquis always exercised.

Now and again he addressed a word or two to the Princess Carasca, bringing her into the conversation; but he devoted himself to impressing the young princess, and he felt that he had succeeded. And if Beryl was impressed, so also was he. Lord Doyme was always susceptible to the power of youth and beauty, and before the quarter of an hour which he had set as a limit of his stay had passed, Beryl had, all unconsciously and without any effort, won, not only his approval but his fervent admiration. Two or three times he had attempted to rise and make his adieu, but he found it difficult to tear himself away. There was a singular fascination for him, not only in her beauty, but in her frank and perfectly natural candour. He said to himself that she was the only woman in the room free from that vice of affectation which, nowadays, is over us all like the slime of a serpent. He led her on to talk, he looked into the clear and trustful eyes, he found himself laying traps for her rare smile; and as he listened and looked, there flashed across his mind the thought, the desire, that Clive could have been by his side also looking and listening.

"I have spent a delightful evening, princess!" he declared, rising at last, and reluctantly; "a more delightful evening than I had any reason to expect, for I am just now in rather low spirits."

Beryl looked at him enquiringly. He sighed and clasped his knee with his long hands.

"Yes; just at present, I am very anxious about a nephew of mine. He is the dearest fellow in the world, and I wish that he were here to-night that I might have the honour of introducing him to you, princess. Alas! He is over in Africa."

"In Africa!" echoed Beryl, suddenly reminded of the fact that this man who had led her to talk so freely was Clive's uncle. Her voice sounded cold and indifferent.

"Yes," he said. "He went over there, like a great many other of our young fellows, in search of adventure. I am afraid he has had more than enough. There has been some serious fighting over there, and I have not heard from him. I do not know what has become of him; and to tell you the truth, I am very anxious. I had intended only to look in here for a few minutes, but the charm of your conversation, prin-

ness"—he bestowed upon her the famous Doyne bow—"has held me captive. I trust I may have the honour and the good fortune to meet you again."

He bowed over her hand and took his departure. As he made his way through the crowded room, he muttered to himself:

"Young, beautiful, a princess, and rich. And that fool of a Clive is fighting niggers in Africa. If he were only here!"

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CHAPTER XLII.

CAPTAIN BURTON, otherwise Lord Clive Marle, landed at Southampton four days later. He had been sent home on sick leave. He was about as thin as a greyhound, and as pale as a *débutante* at her first presentation. In addition to the old scar over his temple, he bore several reminiscences of the charming little skirmishes in South Africa. He had no particular desire to return to England, and during the journey up from Southampton to London, he asked himself more than once what the deuce he should do now he had got there.

He went to his rooms in St. James's, and found a caretaker in charge, who received him with surprise and qualified satisfaction. The furniture was swathed in brown holland, the rooms had that peculiar smell which unused rooms so easily acquire. He felt as if he were an interloper, as if he had no right here. He missed Parsons to an extraordinary degree, considering that he had done without a valet for over a year; and he was immensely relieved at hearing from the caretaker that Parsons had not gone into the public-house business, and that he was anxious to return to his old service. Clive got Parsons's address from the woman in charge, and sent him a wire, asking him to come back; then he went upstairs and was about to change into evening dress—for it was nightfall when he reached London—when he remembered a letter which he carried in his breast-pocket. It was written by Sister Ursula, and was addressed to Sister Marie at the Home of the Nursing Sisters in London. Somehow or other he shrank from going down to his club, shrank from meeting the effusive welcome, and the flood of questions which would be poured upon him. He had a bath, got some dinner at a restaurant, and took a cab to the Home.

When he reached it he sent up the name of Captain Burton. It had become familiar to him and he was loth to part

with it. Under that name he had done the only useful work of his life, and as he intended to go back to Africa as soon as he was strong enough, he was inclined to adopt the name, as far as it was possible, during his short stay in England.

One of the sisters took his name up to the superior, and that lady came down to see him.

"I have a letter for Sister Marie," he said.

"She is not here," said the Lady Superior. "I can send it to her."

"I was asked to give it into her own hands. Can you tell me where I shall find her?"

The Sister Superior was a discreet person. "We are forbidden to give the address of any of our sisters," she said.

Clive looked about him helplessly.

"You have just come from Africa?" said the Lady Superior, glancing at his haggard face.

"Yes," said Clive. "I was nursed by one of your sisters. She saved my life; the least I can do is to carry out her wishes, commands, in regard to this letter."

The Lady Superior thought for a moment or two. "If you wish to deliver it into Sister Marie's own hands," she said, "I will ask her to come here. I will write to her and request her to make an appointment."

"Thank you very much," said Clive, and he took his departure.

On his way back to his rooms he bought an evening paper, and had the pleasure of reading an account of his own exploits and the announcement of his return to England. When he got back, who but Parsons should come down the well-known steps to receive him. Parsons's face lit up with joy for one moment, then grew lengthy as his eyes scanned Clive's face and attenuated figure.

"Oh, my lord! what have you been a-doing?" broke from him involuntarily.

Clive shook hands with him, and was not a little affected, if the truth must be told, by his meeting with his old servant. Parsons led him in, almost as if he were an invalid or a child; the brown holland covers had been ripped off the furniture; Olive's dressing utensils had been laid out on the table, his evening suit had been aired and spread out for him; Parsons brought a soda-and-whisky and a cigar-case, and he fussed around his newly-recovered master as if he were a long-lost and suddenly-found child.

Olive told him some of his South African adventures, and

That his master should go a-fighting was only natural and proper, though weak; but that he should have run a narrow squeak for his life at the hands of naked savages filled Parsons with disgust.

"By-the-way, Parsons," said Clive, as he tied his white bow, "my name for the present is Burton, Captain Burton. If any letters come in that name don't refuse them. I'm glad you haven't gone into the public business just yet, Parsons, for my sake, though I'm rather sorry for your own; for I shall be off to Africa again presently."

Parsons sniffed. "It's to be hoped to the Lord you won't do anything of the kind, my lord," he said. "I should think you've had enough of that. I've been mortal anxious all the while you've been away, and Mr. Godwin says that the marquis has been quite cut up. His lordship ain't one to say much, but Mr. Godwin says that his lordship has been quite on the *qui vive* all the while you've been away."

Clive smiled rather grimly. That the noble Marquis of Doyne should be anxious about any human being, save himself, seemed incredible.

Although he was washed and dressed to Parsons's satisfaction, Clive did not go out that night. To be quite candid, he could not face the fuss which his appearance at one of his clubs would have caused. He spent the evening at home. To say that he thought of Beryl would be unnecessary. As he smoked, he pondered over the fact that it was only six or eight hours to Trentishoe. He wondered whether Sister Marie—for he had learnt that his confession had been made to her and not to Sister Ursula—had gone down to Devonshire and seen Beryl, and what was the result? He went to bed early, and the next morning he took a cab to the offices of the Chartered Company, for the secretary of which he had important letters from the general in South Africa.

The secretary received him very graciously. "We have heard of you, Captain Burton," he said, "and in the name of the company I beg to express my sense of the great services which you have rendered us. I trust you are recovering from your wounds."

Clive said that he was all right.

The secretary smiled on him blandly. "Brave men always make light of their wounds," he said. "Our committee meet at three o'clock to-day, and they would be delighted to see you."

Clive coloured, and shook his head laughingly. He didn't

want to pose as a hero before the committee. " 'Traid I'm engaged," he said.

The secretary understood. "Some other time, perhaps," he said. "You can't hope to escape altogether, Captain Burton. If you go in for the hero business, you must put up with the consequences. By-the-way," he added, "we've a letter for you." He rang a bell and said something to the clerk, who brought a letter which the secretary handed to Clive.

Clive did not open it until he got into his cab. He had recognised his uncle's handwriting. The note was a short one, and, written in Lord Doyne's neat, not to say lady-like, hand, ran thus:

"The Marquis of Doyne presents his compliments to Captain Burton, and would be extremely obliged if Captain Burton would permit the Marquis of Doyne to call upon him; or if it would be more convenient to Captain Burton, the Marquis of Doyne would feel honoured if Captain Burton would call at Doyne House at his earliest convenience."

Clive smiled grimly as he read the note, and tore it into small pieces. It would be rather amusing to take the marquis at his word and present himself at Doyne House as Captain Burton of the South African Troopers. Would his uncle have a fit, or order him to be chucked out?

He had given to the Lady Superior the address of a large club, which he had seldom used, to which she was to write; and in the afternoon he walked down to the club, and, going no farther than the hall, for he did not wish to be seen, he asked if there were any letters for him, giving his name as Captain Burton. To his surprise, the porter handed him one.

He waited until he had got out of sight of the club before he tore open the envelope. It contained a sheet of note-paper on which, under the printed heading of the Home, was a brief intimation that Sister Marie would see Captain Burton at the Home at eight o'clock that evening. He was a little excited, though he could have scarcely told why, and he presented himself at the Home as the clock struck. Had Sister Marie seen Beryl, and if so, what had been the result? He dared not hope, and yet a wild hope did flicker in his breast.

The Lady Superior received him. "Sister Marie is here," she said. "Will you follow me, please?"

She led him up the narrow staircase, and opened the door of a small and barely-furnished room. The blinds were drawn, and the place was only dimly lit by a small lamp

heavily shaded. By this insufficient light he saw a figure shrouded in the nun-like garb of the Nursing Sisters. The heavy veil was so arranged as to conceal her face, and she did not rise when he entered, and when the door closed he waited anxiously for her to speak; for he could not tell whether she was Sister Marie or not.

"You wish to see me?" she said, at last, in a voice so low and masked by her agitation that it was not wonderful he did not recognise it as Beryl's.

"Yes," he said; "Sister Marie, it was very kind of you to meet me."

At the sound of his voice, Beryl's hands gripped each other tightly under her robe, and she asked herself whether she had done wisely in obeying the impulse, the irresistible desire, to see him. Would she have strength to go through the interview, brief though she might be able to make it?

"I have brought you a letter from Sister Ursula," he said. "She asked me to deliver it into your own hands, if it were possible. She came back to Narriqua after you left, and I saw her for a few minutes before I started. You will be glad to hear she was quite well."

As she did not offer to take the letter, he placed it on the table within her reach. One hand stole out to take it, then drew back. There was a silence between them, a silence which oppressed Olive. He looked round the room with all a man's embarrassment; there was something weird and uncanny in talking to this black-robed figure with the hidden face. At last he said:

"Having discharged my mission, will you let me speak to you, Sister Marie, of my—my own affairs? After you left, I discovered, of course, that it was to you and not to Sister Ursula I made confession of an episode in my past life; that it was to you, and not to her, I gave a packet, which I asked you to deliver to the lady of whom I spoke. Have you seen her?" He tried to speak calmly, but his voice faltered.

"I have seen her," said Beryl.

"And you gave her my message?"

"She has your message word for word, as you sent it," said Beryl, as it seemed to him, coldly.

"And what did she say?" Olive asked. "Is there any hope—I mean, has she forgiven me?"

"She has forgiven you," replied Beryl. Olive ought to have felt relieved, grateful; but, somehow, he was disappointed.

"Is that all?" he asked, a little huskily. "You saw her? Was she well? Happy?"

"She was well and happy," said Beryl, almost inaudibly.

"I am glad!" he said; but he sighed. "She didn't—didn't send any message, I suppose, Sister Marie?"

"Yes," replied Beryl, slowly.

"Yes?" he echoed, eagerly. "I'm afraid I'm bothering you a great deal, sister; but you'd forgive me if you knew—but there, you do know! I told you out at Narriqua how it was with me. I am just as much in love with her as ever. But never mind that; I shall be very grateful to you if you will try and remember just what she said."

"I will try," said Beryl. "She wished me to tell you that she had forgiven you, quite forgiven you—"

"How did she know that you would see me?" Olive asked, with a start of surprise.

Beryl's head bent lower. How near she had been to discovery! How careful she must be! "She thought it possible that if you came to England, you might try to see me."

"I see," said Olive. "That was just like her; it was good of her! But please go on!"

"She wished me to tell you that she had not a single hard thought of you, that she was glad that you had left England, and were living so noble a life, that she should never cease to pray for you, for your safety and your happiness."

Olive drew a long breath. "I told you she was an angel," he said. But he sighed again. It is to be feared that he wanted Beryl's love more than her prayers.

"Is that all?" he asked.

"All!" echoed Beryl, softly.

Poor Olive hung his head. "Of course, that would be all!" he said. "I couldn't expect any more. And yet—" He stopped and looked round the room mechanically, and beat a tattoo with his fingers on the plain deal table. "I thought, I hoped—I don't like to say what I hoped, sister; but I dare say you can guess." There was silence for a moment, then he asked, shamefacedly: "Do you think it would be any use my going down to Devonshire to see her?"

Beryl started, and her hand went up to her heart. "Not the least," she said.

"You asked her?" said Olive. "You don't think she would see me?"

"It would be no use," said Beryl, almost inaudibly. "She has put the past away from her: it would only pain her—"

"I understand," said Olive, hoarsely. "She has ceased to care for me. Well, it would be rather strange if she hadn't."

He turned away, and Beryl stole a glance at him. His haggard face, his whole attitude, so expressive of disappointment and despair, wrought upon her so strongly that she felt as if she must go to him, touch him, throw herself into his arms. But she remembered the barrier between them, and with a great, a woman's effort, fought against the impulse.

"I'm very grateful to you, Sister Marie," Olive said, at last, and with a forced cheerfulness, which hurt her far more than any open exhibition of grief could have done. "I'll take myself off now."

"Where are you going?" asked Beryl, after a pause.

"Back to Africa," he replied.

"You are not strong enough!" she said, almost inaudibly.

"Oh, yes," he said, briskly, "the voyage has set me up wonderfully, and I am quite fit. But I don't forget the debt I owe to Sister Ursula, and to you, Sister Marie—for you did your turn in nursing me, you know; and I took a turn for the better that night. I shall go back to Africa at once. Have you any message for Sister Ursula, if I should meet her?"

"Only my love," said Beryl.

"All right, I'll give her that," said Olive. "Now I'll say good-bye, Sister Marie. I don't suppose we shall meet again, but I shall remember your goodness to me while life lasts."

His voice broke as he held out his hand. Beryl's hands unclasped, and one stole out towards him; but she drew it back, for she knew well enough that, if she let him touch her, her resolution would melt like snow in the sun. It was too much to risk.

Olive's hand fell to his side. "Good-bye," he said again, and he left the room.

Beryl remained motionless until the door had closed; then she sprang to her feet and threw out her arms, and cried: "Olive, Olive! Come back!"

But she heard Olive's feet pounding down the stair. Her voice had not reached him, and, with a moan, she dropped on her knees beside the table and hid her face, which he had not seen, in her hands.

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CHAPTER XLIII.

CLIVE walked all the way back to his rooms. He had scarcely dared to hope, but hope will spring eternal in the human breast. However, it was all over now. The sooner he went out to Africa again, and got knocked on the head, the better; for without Beryl life was not worth living. Parsons had kept some dinner for him, and he tried to eat it, with very poor success. During the mockery of a meal, he was smitten by the desire to accept the invitation which the Marquis of Doyne had graciously given to "Captain Burton." He was full of a kind of bitterness, and he thought it would amuse him and distract his mind to spring a surprise upon his uncle. He rang for his light overcoat, and walked round to Doyne house.

"Say 'Captain Burton,'" he said, to the hall-porter. "Never you mind, Wilkins," for, of course, the hall-porter knew him. "Just say Captain Burton."

The porter passed the message on to a footman who happened to be a new servant, and did not know Clive, and the man came back presently, and ushered him up the broad staircase into the drawing-room. The marquis had dined wisely and well, and was just going out. The candles had been lit, and the light was not very good, and he came forward, fumbling for his *pince-nez*, and with a smile of welcome.

"I am delighted to see you, Captain Burton!" he began. "One wishes that one could greet you with the strains of 'See the Conquering Hero,' for we have all heard of your heroic deeds, and we are anxious to welcome—" By this time, he had got near enough to Clive to recognise him, and he broke off to exclaim: "What the devil! Why, it's you, Clive!"

"Yes, it's I, sir," said Clive. "How do you do?"

The marquis held on to Clive's hand, and stared, and gasped:

"My dear boy—! But they told me 'Captain Burton!'"

"I am Captain Burton," said Clive, almost amused—only almost; for his heart was heavy within him. "That's my fighting name."

The marquis seemed to struggle for breath. "You mean to say you are the Captain Burton they are making so much fuss about?" he demanded.

"Are they making a fuss about him?" said Clive.

"My dear boy!" ejaculated the marquis. "His—I mean your—confound it, I am getting quite confused—your name's in everybody's mouth! You're the one man everybody wants to see! Haven't you seen the papers? Don't you know that they are talking about giving you the C. B.? Where have you been? Have you been living with your head in the sand like an ostrich? My dear Clive, this is the happiest moment of my life. Sit down; no, stand up! I want to see you. Good lord, how thin you are! And you're looking like a hero! Well, well, well! Have you had your dinner? They'll get something for you directly."

Clive was not unmoved by his reception. "I've had my dinner, thanks," he said.

"Are you sure? Quite sure? My dear boy!" He placed his white hand on Clive's broad shoulders, and swayed him to and fro gently. "I wish I could tell you how glad I am to see you! But I was never good at expressing my emotion. And so you've come back! Come back to stay, I hope! But that's of course!"

"I'm going back to Africa almost directly, sir," said Clive.

The marquis smiled with bland incredulity; he was recovering himself.

"Nonsense! We'll see about that! I should imagine you've had enough of that African business. It was all very well, and has turned out better than I expected; though, if you remember, I told you it was not a bad idea!"

Clive tried to look as if he remembered.

"But, my dear boy, there has been enough of it, quite enough. You have won your spurs, and become famous, and now you must rest on your laurels! Don't tell me any such nonsense about going back. My dear Clive, we are all waiting for you, we are all waiting to crown with laurels that brow of 'Captain Burton,' the hero of a hundred fights, the hero of—what-you-may-call-it? I never can remember names."

Clive looked rather puzzled. "I don't understand," he said. "How did you hear?"

"Hear! The papers have been full of you. Besides, there is a man over here, a young Italian count, who spends the whole of his time blowing your trumpet. The man whose life you saved, you know, Count Something-or-other. He was raving about you at the Outcasts' last night. I heard him, and asked him some questions, little thinking that the Captain Burton he was ranting about was my own boy. God

bless my soul, I'm quite upset! Would you mind ringing and asking them to bring some brandy-and-soda?"

Clive rang, and the marquis went on:

"I want you to tell me all about it. Not now, for I'm going out. I'm going to Lady Beechwolde's, and so are you. My dear Clive, I won't take any refusal. I want you to come; I insist. Good lord, how thin you are!" He turned to the butler who had brought in the brandy-and-soda. "Give some to Lord Clive. You remember Lord Clive—I mean Captain Burton? Confound it, my old head's in a whirl! My dear Clive, you should not, you really should *not*, have played such a trick on me; at my age it is risky, quite risky! But come along; we can talk as we go."

Clive saw that the old man was much moved. He forgave him the hard words he had said at their last parting, and he followed him down to the carriage, though reluctantly; for he felt very much more inclined to go back to his own rooms, and think of Beryl than appear in the marquis's company at an evening party.

"And when did you come back?" asked Doyme, as they bowled along. Clive told him. "And why didn't you come to me at once? But never mind; I'll forgive you! We've all got to forgive each other, my dear boy," with an unexpected naturalness which, coming from the Marquis of Doyme, was strangely pathetic. "And I've got to tell you all the news. By-the-way, you're all right?" He looked at Clive with a sudden anxiety. "You're not married?"

Clive's face grew grim. "No! nor likely to be!" he said.

"I'm immensely relieved," replied the marquis, with a sigh. "One never knows what may happen to young fellows when they go abroad. You might have come back and presented to me a bride—a dusky bride. Good lord! that's absurd, of course, but I'm glad you're free, Clive." His thoughts flew towards the Princess Pelagio. Was it not almost providential that Clive—Clive, very thin and haggard-looking, but as handsome as ever, and with a really most interesting reputation—should come back just at this critical moment? "You don't ask after old friends, Clive? I suppose you have heard all the news?"

"No," said Clive, "I've heard none." He enquired after some mutual friends and acquaintances. Then he remembered Lady Blanche. "And how is Lady Blanche, sir?" he asked.

"As well and beautiful as ever, my dear boy. I've got a surprise for you there. She's engaged to Lord Clarence."

Olive was not very surprised, but he was very glad, and said so.

"Y-es," said the marquis, a little ruefully; but he swallowed his disappointment, and went on brightly: "Yes, Clarence wouldn't take 'no,' though I believe Blanche offered it to him several times. She gave in at last; I fancy he wore her out. My dear Olive, women, so far as my experience goes—and I think you'll admit it goes some distance—women will always accept a man if he asks them often enough. Clarence is absurdly happy, and Blanche—ah, well; she had to marry, you know, and—er—yes; quite so. Here we are. Prepare for a little sensation, my dear Clive. Upon my soul, I'm half inclined to introduce you as 'Captain Burton.'" He chuckled; then, as the carriage slowed down, he became serious, and, laying his hand on Clive's arm, said: "I want to introduce you, my dear boy, to a young lady whom I hope to see here to-night. She is almost as famous as—Captain Burton. The most beautiful young creature you ever saw, and one of the most charming. I give you my word, my dear Clive, that she won my heart the very first time I saw her. She is a little romance, so to speak. She is a princess—the Princess Pelagio; an adopted daughter of an Italian nobleman, who left her a palace on the lake from which she takes her title, and an immense fortune. She will be here to-night, and I hope, my dear Olive, you will be as much impressed by her really extraordinary loveliness and charm as I am."

Clive could not repress a smile, though it was rather a bitter and weary one. How little altered was the great world which he had left! Even in the genuine and obvious joy of the marquis at the unexpected return of his nephew in the character of a hero, he was as bent upon match-making as ever.

There was a long line of carriages outside the house. Doyne and his nephew made their way with difficulty up the crowded stairs and into the still more crowded room; and as they did so, old friends and acquaintances recognised Clive, and greeted him with warmth, the marquis standing by, smiling and nodding with profound satisfaction. As they left their hostess and went with the tide towards the centre of the room, a young man saw them, started with astonishment, and hurrying forward, caught Clive's arm.

"Captain Burton, you here!"

It was Count Hubert; he had spoken loudly, and the people near him heard the name which was in every paper and on every lip, and, naturally, stopped and stared. How could

Olive Marle be Captain Burton? A buzz of curiosity arose, and a kind of circle drew round the three men. Olive looked hot and uncomfortable, for, even more than most Englishmen, he hated a scene. He muttered something—it sounded like a big D—and drew Count Hubert aside. He felt very much as if he should like to gag him.

"Look here!" he said. "Burton isn't my name, my real name; it's Marle, and I hope you haven't been telling all these people—"

Count Hubert looked amazed and a little hurt. An Italian does not consider it bad form to express his gratitude for the saving of his life.

"I am so glad to see you!" he said. "Have I told anybody that you saved my life? Why, of course I have. You are not ashamed of it, are you, Captain Burton—I mean Marle? It wasn't worth saving, I am aware—"

"That's all right, my dear fellow," answered Olive. "But it isn't worth speaking of; you would have done the same for me; and all these idiots like to make a fuss. You're looking very well, none the worse for your African trip."

"Yes, yes!" said Count Hubert. "But I wish I could say the same of you; you are looking thin and pale. But no wonder! And you have just come to England? What a place it is! And your people, how kind! Do you know anybody here? I have made so many friends—I must introduce you! Let me see—ah, yes! There is a countrywoman of mine here; you will let me take you to her? She is delightful—an old friend of mine, and she has with her the most beautiful and charming of her sex. She, too, is a great friend of mine; I am proud to think that she permits me to call her one. Some day I will tell you how I once wished that I could call her more than friend. But that is all passed; and she is gracious enough to accept my poor friendship. You understand, Burton?"

Olive didn't understand in the least, and, if the truth must be told, he looked rather bored. He had come there against his will, and was anxious to get away.

"Shall be delighted," he said, with anything but a delighted countenance.

"Come, then!" cried Count Hubert, with his national excitement. "I have told her of the way in which you rescued me. Well, well! I will not say any more, as you do not like it. And I know she will be glad to know you."

Olive rose resignedly, and followed Hubert. As they made their way through the crowd, people stared at them, and as

they smiled and nodded at Clive, exchanged whispers. The latter looked as if he were being led to execution.

Suddenly another young fellow darted forward, and caught Clive by the shoulder. It was Wally.

"Halloo, old man!" he exclaimed, with irrepressible affection and delight. "Dashed if I can believe my eyes! When did you come back? My dear old chap, how delighted we all are to see you!"

"You know Captain Burton?" said Hubert, all smiles and generous excitement.

Wally stared, and then exclaimed:

"So you're 'Captain Burton'! Captain Burton!" He burst into a laugh. "I might have guessed it! This is Lord Clive Marle, Count Hubert!"

Clive caught the man's arm. "Shut up, Wally," he said. "Everybody's listening and staring. I'll see you later—meet you at the club." He hurried Hubert out of the crowd. "We shall be chucked out for a nuisance presently," he declared.

Hubert laughed. "You English are so strange!" he said. "You behave as if you were ashamed of a noble action. Ah, here is my friend." He stopped before the Princess Carasca, who was seated with Beryl by her side.

"Princess," he said, "permit me to introduce to you the gentleman of whom I have so often told you; the Captain Burton, who is, I learn, the Lord Clive Marle."

Clive bowed without raising his eyes. "I am delighted to meet you," said the Princess Carasca. She turned to Beryl. "This is the gentleman Count Hubert has told us of—"

Clive looked, prepared to make another formal bow, and gazed straight into the eyes of Beryl Frayne. For a moment he asked himself if he had gone out of his mind, if he were asleep and dreaming.

"The Princess Pelagio!" said Hubert, in Clive's ear. Clive still stared, and forgot all about his bow.

"Princess—Pelagio!" he echoed, like a man amazed.

Beryl's face was white, her lips apart; she could not withdraw her eyes from his; she could not speak. Hubert looked on with a smile of suppressed excitement. "You will find Captain Burton the strangest man," he said. "He is quite ashamed of saving a fellow-creature's life."

Beryl tried to smile. She knew that Clive was waiting to hear her speak, that he could not believe his eyes.

"I am glad to know—Captain Burton," she said.

At the sound of her voice, Clive took a step forward.

"Beryl!" he exclaimed in a low voice. The Princess Carasca and Hubert were talking and had not observed his agitation, and did not hear his exclamation.

"Beryl!" he repeated. Then the crowded room seemed to swing giddily round him. He stretched out his hand. "It is you! I want to speak to you! Come!"

She rose as if she could not help herself. There was a shadowed recess near them, and, scarcely knowing what he was doing, he took her hand, and led her into it. There he stood regarding her amazedly, his breath coming and going rapidly.

"It is you!" he repeated. "What does it mean? 'The Princess Pelagio.' But never mind—I don't care! Beryl, why did you send me that message? Have you ceased to care for me? Do you mean to cast me off forever? No, no! You can't! You can't be so cruel! Look at me, speak to me! How is it I meet you here? Why do they call you a princess? But I don't care—you are Beryl Frayne to me; *my* Beryl! Yes, *mine*! Beryl, I love you! You won't cast me off! You say that you have forgiven me! What kind of forgiveness is that, if you intend to make me wretched for the rest of my life? Beryl, speak to me!"

She was trembling in every limb, the grip of his hand hurt her; she could not remove her eyes from his face.

"Hush, hush!" she whispered. "Oh, Clive, Clive!"

"Who cares who hears!" he exclaimed. He was half mad with a commingled joy and anxiety. "I want your answer; I want to know what you're going to do. You *must* tell me. Tell me, now—here—at once! I cannot wait!"

This is the kind of wooing which no woman in the world, who is worth her salt, can resist. If he had pleaded in humble and faltering tones, she might have been able to withstand him; but this masterful speech of his gripped her heart, tugged at it, tore it from her bosom. She looked up at him, at the haggard face, on which the scars showed redly, and, as she looked, all unconsciously, she drew nearer to him. Her lips parted.

"Clive!" she murmured. There was all a woman's surrender in the tone, all a woman's passionate love in the beautiful eyes.

He caught her to him—it was fortunate for them that a heavy curtain concealed them—and, bending his head, kissed

nas happened to you. Why do they call you the princess?—what is it?”

Beryl tried to draw away from him.

“No, you don’t!” he said in tones so like the old Clive that her heart beat joyously, hotly. “Just you tell me what it all means. You were Beryl Frayne when last we met—and parted. Why do they call you a princess?”

“It is such a long story, Clive,” she said. “And, oh, dearest, let me go!”

“Not a bit of it!” he replied.

“Some one will be coming!”

“I don’t care,” he retorted.

At that moment her fear was realised, for the curtain was drawn aside, and the marquis, with the Princess Carasca on his arm, came into the recess.

“Ah, here he is!” said Doyne. “My dear Clive, I want to introduce you—” Then he stopped, amazed, for though Beryl had succeeded in slipping from Clive’s grasp, he still held her hand. The marquis stared, the Princess Carasca uttered an exclamation. But Clive was no longer shy or embarrassed.

“Permit me to introduce you to my future wife, sir,” he said.

Doyne gasped; the Princess Carasca sank into a chair.

“The Marquis of Doyne, Miss Beryl Frayne,” said Clive, making the introduction with grim punctiliousness.

“Eh!” exclaimed the marquis. “My dear boy, have you taken leave of your senses! That lady is the Princess Pelagiol!”

“Is she?” returned Clive, coolly. “I only know her as Beryl Frayne.”

The Princess Carasca was a clever little woman, and rose to the occasion, as Wally would have said, “like a brick.”

“Let me explain, marquis,” she said. “The Princess Pelagiol was Miss Beryl Frayne; but my brother, for reasons which were all-sufficient, adopted her as his daughter, and gave to her the estate from which she takes her title. It is evident that your nephew, Lord Marle, and my dear Beryl are old friends.”

Doyne gasped.

Clive nodded.

“Beryl—Miss Frayne—and I first met in Devonshire, at Trentishoe—you remember my going down there, sir? We have been separated by—by circumstances which it is not necessary to go into just now, but we have met again—as you see.”

The marquis did see. He was sharp enough to see it all, and his face grew pale, and his jaw dropped as he thought of the conspiracy, the plot, in which he and Godwin and Patsy Pryde—save the mark!—had been engaged. For the first time in his life the noble Marquis of Doyne was rendered speechless. At last, recovering himself, he said, with a ghastly smile:

"This is no place for us, Princess Carasca; we are most decidedly *de trop*." And he led her away.

* * * * *

"But what I want to know," said Clive, as he and Beryl sat in a dark corner of the drawing-room of the house which Princess Carasca had rented for the season, "what I want to know is, why, having forgiven me, as you said you had, you still hardened your heart against me? I'm a bad lot, I know. I suppose some one, some candid friend, had been telling you how bad I was? I don't want to know his name, but I imagine he must have told you on the day we were to have been married. And you believed him?"

Beryl hung her head.

"Yes; I believed—him. But I can believe no longer, Clive. I do not know why, but I cannot. But that was not the only reason. Clive, I am not worthy of you."

Clive treated this assertion as an exquisite joke, and laughed accordingly; but Beryl looked very grave, and there were even tears in her eyes.

"If I told you, Clive, that there was something in the history of my mother which—which I felt was a barrier between us—"

Clive did not laugh again, but he drew her closer to him, as he said, very earnestly, almost solemnly:

"My dearest, whatever barrier you may have thought existed between us is broken down once and forever. Why," and his voice changed, "what do I care for the past, about any scruples of yours, about the history of any one belonging to you. I want *you*, and I mean to have you. Put away from you any thought of barrier or obstacle, and believe me when I say that I care not a single straw for anything of the kind."

Much sorrow and disappointment, the bitter experience of that hope deferred which maketh the heart sick, had taught Beryl wisdom. She wisely reserved the story of her mother's life for the future, and, bending, kissed her love for his gen-

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CHAPTER XLIV.

ONE night, while the world was still talking of the romantic engagement between Lord Clive Marle, *alias* the famous Captain Burton, and the Princess Pelagio, Clive appeared at the Princess Carasca's with tickets for the theatre.

A month had elapsed since their meeting and reconciliation, a month of perfect happiness—four weeks of unbroken felicity; for the sun was shining very brightly on Beryl Frayne and Clive Marle. Their marriage was to take place in the autumn; and, strange to say, the romantic history of their attachment still possessed a charm for society, and provided gossip at clubs and tea-tables.

The young couple were regarded with the deepest interest mixed with admiration. Clive's creditors ceased to clamour, and waited with smiling patience for the discharge of their debts. Clive had long since grown weary of congratulations—congratulations which had not only poured upon him, but upon the marquis. The marquis ought to have been a very happy man, for this coming marriage of his nephew to the wealthy Princess Pelagio was a kind of match which redounded, as one might say, to his own credit; but Doyne was uneasy in his mind, and his responses to congratulations were always a little forced and nervous.

He had grown genuinely attached to Beryl, and he was living in daily dread of the discovery of the little plot in which he had been assisted by Godwin and Patsy Pryde. He got rid of Godwin by sending him off to a friend on the Continent who had long envied the marquis his invaluable valet. Godwin was disposed of, but there was still Patsy Pryde; and she was still in London, and, indeed, delighting audiences at the Frivolity. If only she would continue to hold her tongue, Doyne was safe; but there were times when, to put it with a vulgarity which would have shocked himself, he quaked in his shoes.

It was for the Frivolity Clive had bought tickets for that night. He had sent Parsons to book seats at one of the theatres, though he had not felt sure that Beryl would care to go; for they had returned only the previous day from a visit which they had paid, in company with the Princess Carasca, to Trentishoe. There they had seen old friends, had taken tea

at Hill Cote, which was still in charge of the Saunders; had dined with the dear old doctor and the rector and his family; had paid a visit to the church, where Beryl with bent head—lowered to hide her tears—had played on her old organ. They had walked across the moor, had stood silently on the very spot where Olive had drawn the venom from Beryl's wrist.

It had been a visit full of excitement for Beryl, and when he drew the tickets from his pocket, he said, "We won't go if you are tired, dearest."

But Beryl said that she was not tired, and the Princess Carasca, glancing at the tickets, expressed a wish to go.

"It is to the Frivolity, Beryl," she said; "the theatre where that girl dances in such an extraordinary way. What is her name?—Patsy Pryde."

Olive looked grave, but said nothing. Beryl and he had come to a tacit understanding not to speak of the past.

They went down to the theatre, and Olive found that Parsons had engaged the stage box. The theatre was full, and their entrance caused that little buzz and stir of interest which, though he ought to have grown used to it, always annoyed Olive. Beryl drew behind the curtain, and he leant over her chair, feeling to the full that delight which a lover always has in his nearness to his mistress. He paid very little attention to the burlesque, but Beryl herself watched the business of the stage gravely. When Patsy Pryde appeared, and was received with the usual uproarious welcome, Beryl grew a little pale, and her brows came together. She had grown to believe in Olive's innocence, notwithstanding the terrible evidence of the scene at his room in St. James's; but the sight of Patsy Pryde, of this woman—if she were indeed the same woman, for even now Beryl did not recognise her—pained her.

Patsy performed her first dance with all the terrible vigour which distinguished it, and raised it a head and shoulders above any similar performance; the roar of applause rose from the crowded audience, and shouts of *encore* came from pit and gallery. The Princess Carasca leant back with a little shudder.

"I do hope she will not dance again!" she said. "It is very wonderful, but, in some way, it distresses me. Do you remember, Beryl, what Count Rudolph said; that she would do it once too often?"

Beryl made no response. Olive stood erect, biting his lip. A man's folly will rise like a spectre long after he has buried it. The world had consented to forget Olive Marle's reckless

and foolish past; but he himself could not forget it. It rose to confront him even in this moment of his happiness; it confronted him in the shape of Patsy Pryde.

She came forward to repeat the wonderful dance. The orchestra struck up the strains which had fascinated all London, which had reached every court and alley, where the children danced to its music, played by the street organ. With a smile on her painted lips, Patsy Pryde bounded forward, threw out her arms, which held lightly the innumerable folds forming her skirt, with inimitable grace; and with a nameless *abandon*, she executed a part of the dance.

The audience wagged its head to the music, every eye was fixed upon her with pleasure and delight; then suddenly she stopped, her arms went up above her head, she seemed to stagger and looked from side to side with a stare of terror and surprise, as if she could not understand the sudden and awful incapacity which had befallen her. Her lips parted with a cry which, though it did not reach the whole of the audience, was plainly heard in the box near the stage. For a moment she stood, her face distorted, her eyes staring with a look of terror in them; then she fell, a heap of white muslin, upon the stage.

A cry of horror rose from the crowded theatre, the music ceased, the leader of the orchestra started from his chair, two or three persons ran forward from the wing to her assistance. The curtain fell.

Beryl rose faint and trembling. As he did so, the door which opened from the box on to the stage was thrown open and one of the officials of the theatre looked in with a pale face.

"Is there a doctor—?" he began.

Impulsively Beryl moved forward.

"Where are you going, Beryl?" asked the Princess Carasca, agitatedly.

Beryl seemed scarcely to hear her. "I may be of some use," she faltered; and she passed through the door on to the stage. Olive and the Princess Carasca followed her. They saw Patsy Pryde being carried to her dressing-room; Beryl was walking beside her, holding her hand. They laid the stricken creature on a couch. A doctor had come to their aid, and was bending over her with grave and inscrutable countenance.

"She must be taken home," he said.

The manager had already sent for her carriage.

"I shall want a nurse," said the doctor. He wrote some-

thing in pencil on his card. "Let some one take this to the Charing Cross Hospital."

Beryl, whose arm was supporting Patsy's head, looked up.

"I am a nurse," she said. "I will go with her."

The doctor looked at her with surprise and incredulity.

"I will go with her," repeated Beryl. "I—I know her!"

"Beryl!" whispered Olive, remonstratingly. She raised her eyes and looked at him, and any further remonstrance died on his lips.

Beryl supported Patsy Pryde in her arms as the carriage took them to the dancer's house in Mayfair; and Patsy Pryde's head was still on Beryl Frayne's arm when, an hour or two later, the butterfly, with the broken wing, opened her eyes.

For a moment she did not recognise Beryl, then, as she did so, she uttered a little cry, and shuddered slightly.

"I saw you in the theatre," she said, "just—just before I fell. At first I thought I was mistaken, and that it wasn't you; then I saw him behind you, and I knew."

The voice was thick and husky, so unlike the voice which had rung out so clearly and merrily in the theatre, that Beryl could not repress a shudder.

Some one came forward with a towel and a preparation of vaseline with which actors remove the grease paint they use in "making up." Beryl tenderly wiped the face, and there, beneath her eyes, stood revealed the pallid countenance, the deep lines, the hollows of the face of the girl she had seen in Olive's room. But the pallor, the lines, the black hollows beneath the eyes were not now fictitious, but all too real.

"You know me?" said Patsy, with laboured breath.

Beryl made a gesture of assent. "Don't try to talk!" she said.

A smile flickered on the distorted face. "What's it matter?" she said, in a hollow whisper. "It's all up with me. They told me it would end like this, but I didn't believe them; but the blessed doctors are mighty clever, and they generally prove right. I've danced my last dance, and sung my last song, and there's an end of Patsy Pryde! Well, I've had a good time; and I haven't been much worse than others. I haven't done many mean things; and the meanest I did was that day I played it so low on you, in Lord Olive's room. You remember?"

"We will forget it," said Beryl, gently.

"Ah, yes, it's easy for you!" panted Patsy. "You've found out long since that the whole thing was a plant."

Beryl started and looked at her, and Patsy Pryde peered up into the pitying eyes with astonishment.

"Do you mean to say you don't know?" she said. "Don't you know that it was all a trick, that I was playing a part, that there wasn't a word of truth in what I said?"

Beryl trembled and tried to speak, but could not.

"It was a made-up thing," said Patsy. "I was paid to do it, but I'd a-done it for nothing; for I was jealous, and I hated you. It was all a plant between me and— But I won't mention any names; I'll take it all on myself, for, as I say, I'd have done it 'on my own.' And you believed it all so easily! You believed the story of the farmer's daughter, and all of it. You didn't see that I was dressed and made up for the part. I did it well; I'll say that for myself. I might have been a first-class actress if I hadn't started in the burlesque business. Don't you think so yourself?"

Her voice failed her, her paralysed hands moved restlessly, a long sigh shook her.

"But it was a cruel thing to do!" she went on, when she had regained her breath. "I see it now. It was rough on him as well as you, for he never wronged me. He was a jolly sight too good for me. Better than I deserved! But it doesn't matter now. You've come together again, and it's all right. I caught a glimpse of him in the box to-night, and I could see by his face. Is he here?"

Clive was waiting in an adjoining room; at a sign from Beryl, one of the women of the house went to bring him. He came in and stood beside the bed, and Patsy Pryde tried to nod at him with her old light-hearted audacity.

"Come to see the last of me, Clive?" she said. "I've been making an open breast of it to the young lady. I'm a bad lot, I know. I don't suppose you'll forgive me, though she has; I can see it in her face."

Clive could not utter a word.

"Speak to her," said Beryl in a low, grave voice.

"Hold on," said Patsy. "Let him know what I've done." She looked up at Clive with rapidly dimming eyes. "I went to her—the day of your marriage—I told her a lot of lies—I painted you as black as old Nick—as black as the villain at the Adelphi. I scared her into running away from you. She'll—she'll tell you—I—I can't talk any more; it's getting so dark! . . . They're turning the lights out before I've finished my dance! . . . Don't let the people go till I've got through my *encore*! I can't dance; the stage is all in waves. . . . There's that girl in the box, the girl I played

the trick on! . . . How tired I am! I'll take a rest after this . . . a long rest!"

She drew a long sigh, the hands grew suddenly still. Patsy Pryde had gone to take her long rest.

* * * * *

Olive and Beryl scarcely spoke to each other on their way home; but, when they were alone, Olive took Beryl's hand, and looked into her tear-stained face gravely.

"Don't fret, Beryl," he said.

Beryl shook her head.

"How can I help fretting?" she said. "If you had wronged me as I have wronged you, Olive; if you had allowed yourself to be deceived, as I was deceived—"

"Just tell me what occurred," he said. He still held her hand, while she told him the story of Patsy Pryde's only appearance in tragedy.

"And I believed her!" she wound up, with a world of regret and remorse.

"Why should you not have done so?" said Olive, comforting her. "I always suspected her of being a good actress, and I can understand how she would take you in, you who knew nothing of the theatre, and the way in which it is possible for these people to disguise themselves. But didn't she say something of some one else who had helped her, given her the idea?"

Beryl remained silent, and Olive got up and walked up and down, his brows knit.

"There's some mystery hanging about it still," he said.

"But we'll let it go; we'll bury it with her."

"And you forgive me, Olive?" she said, imploringly, with both her hands upon his shoulder, her face turned up piteously to his.

"Forgive!" he responded, pressing her to him. "What have I got to forgive? It was only natural that you should believe her, that you should think that I had intended to—to—I can scarcely speak the word!—to deceive and wrong you, as she told you I had deceived her; but when you got that packet I sent—gave to you—you saw at once that you had misjudged me. That made it all clear, of course."

Beryl started slightly, and a gleam of relief lightened the piteousness of her face. "Wait!" she whispered. She drew herself from his arms, and glided from the room. When she came back, she held out to him the packet—unbroken.

Olive took it, turned it over, and looked from it to her in amazement.

"You haven't opened it!" he exclaimed.

"No," she whispered; "I was afraid. I was afraid there might be something in it which I could not resist—something that would have broken down my resolution, and would have drawn me to you; and I felt I was not worthy."

"And you believe without opening it!" he exclaimed.

"And you ask me to forgive you. You angel! Open it now!"

She opened the envelope with trembling fingers, and took out the marriage licence.

"Oh, Olive, Olive! How can I ever make it up to you—how can I ever repay you the great debt I owe you. But I'll try, Olive! I'll try, dearest, dearest!"

It is scarcely necessary to say that she succeeded.

From that hour not another word was said between them of that dark episode in their lives.

The next day the marquis came round to see Beryl. He had read the account of Patsy's death, and it need scarcely be said that the reporter indulged in a graphic account of the Princess Pelagio's goodness to the dying actress. He felt convinced that Patsy had made a clean breast of it, and, as Doyme, with all his faults, did not lack courage, he came round to "face the music." He did not hold out his hand when Beryl entered the room, but bowed gravely, and even humbly, as one who had come to receive well-deserved punishment. A single glance at her face told him that she had guessed his share in the conspiracy.

"I have come to receive my sentence, princess," he said.

"What can I say to you?"

"Nothing," answered Beryl in a low voice.

"What am I to say to Olive?" he asked, humbly.

"Nothing!" said Beryl again. "He does not know—he never will know, unless you tell him."

The old man tried to conceal his emotion, but his lips quivered, and there was something very much like tears in his eyes as he raised them to hers. Strangely enough, he echoed Olive's words:

"You are an angel!" he said.

THE END.

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